



STATEMENT OF

THE HONORABLE MARK SHEPHERD
MAYOR, CITY OF CLEARFIELD, UTAH

BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

“Oversight of the U.S. Census Bureau”

DECEMBER 5, 2024

Chairman Comer, Ranking Member Raskin, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the record. My name is Mark Shepherd, and I am the mayor of Clearfield City, Utah and a member of the Utah League of Cities and Towns and the National League of Cities. Clearfield City is a vibrant community of 34,470 residents in northern Utah. Established in the late 1800s as a farming village, it has evolved into an Air Force bedroom community, a thriving manufacturing hub, and a steadily growing city.

I am writing today to stress the critical importance of an accurate and well-funded U.S. Census and the significant impact the 2020 Census miscount had on Clearfield City.

Overview of the 2020 Census Miscounts

The 2020 Census revealed significant challenges in accurately counting populations across the country. Clearfield City was among the communities affected by these miscounts, which led to a documented undercount of over 3,500 residents, which constitutes a 12% change in Clearfield's population. While undercounting occurred throughout the city, it was most pronounced in our high-density areas. Residents living in apartments were significantly undercounted. It was immediately apparent to the city that the census figures were incorrect, yet it took a full year for the federal government to address and correct the miscount. In the meantime, these inaccuracies hindered the city's access to crucial federal funding, misrepresented its residents, and created significant stress--stress that was exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Both the city and its residents felt overlooked by the federal government and were deeply concerned that the undercount would affect the community for the next decade.

The Project on Government Oversight, a nonpartisan nonprofit government watchdog group, identified 338 federal assistance programs that relied on census data to direct more than \$2.1 trillion in federal funds to states and communities in fiscal year 2020.¹ A prominent example is the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), a vital resource for cities to invest in affordable housing, infrastructure, and community programs. A reduction of CDBG funding would be catastrophic to a mid-sized city like Clearfield and would directly harm residents and city fiscal soundness.

Cities are the closest level of government to residents, providing the most direct services across the United States. However, they are often constrained by complex and overlapping state-level Tax and Expenditure Limits, which restrict available funding. For instance, in

¹ "Dollars and Demographics: How Census Data Shapes Federal Funding Distribution," Project on Government Oversight (September 11, 2023), available at: <https://www.pogo.org/reports/dollars-and-demographics-how-census-data-shapes-federal-funding-distribution>.

Utah, laws limit both property tax rates and property valuations.² Consequently, federal formula funding has become a critical resource for cities. Decreased federal funding based on miscounted census data can cause delays in essential projects, strained local budgets, and diminishing services for vulnerable populations, such as seniors. Ensuring accurate census data and adequate federal funding is essential to empowering cities to meet the needs of their communities and to uphold the well-being of all residents.

The Importance of Fully Funding the Census Bureau

The Census is more than just a count; it determines how resources are distributed, representation is decided in Congress, businesses make investments, and cities plan for the future. An inaccurate count jeopardizes these processes.³

Looking ahead, I urge the Committee to fully fund the Census Bureau and provide it with the resources necessary to conduct comprehensive test sites in 2026 and 2028.⁴ These test sites are critical for ensuring that challenges identified in 2020, such as substantial undercounts and the transition to digital data collection, are resolved by the 2030 Census. A 2022 Government Accountability Report found that budgetary uncertainty “can disrupt key research and testing planning” and led to the cancelation or curtailment of field tests in 2013, 2017, and 2018.⁵ Allowing the Census to properly conduct its test sites ahead of 2030 by providing the Bureau adequate funding will help identify and address emerging challenges, ensuring a more accurate count.

The cities most impacted by undercounts are those like Clearfield, where every dollar must stretch further than in larger urban centers with well-established tax bases and more diverse revenue streams. Small and midsize cities often lack the financial flexibility to recover from undercounts. Our residents deserve equitable access to resources and

² “Consequences of State Tax and Expenditure Limits on Local Services,” National League of Cities (November 2, 2021), *available at*: <https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Preemption-Brief-2-Consequences-of-State-Tax-and-Expenditure-Limits-Brief-1.pdf>.

³ Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas all experienced undercounts in 2020. “2020 Census Undercounts in Six States, Overcounts in Eight,” U.S. Census Bureau (May 19, 2022), *available at*: <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/05/2020-census-undercount-overcount-rates-by-state.html>.

⁴ “2026 Census Test,” U.S. Census Bureau, *available at*: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade/2030/planning-management/plan/research-and-testing/2026-census-test.html>.

⁵ “2020 Census:

Lessons Learned from Planning and Implementing the 2020 Census Offer Insights to Support 2030 Preparations,” United States Government Accountability Office (February 2022), *available at*: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/720/719018.pdf>.

services, yet due to miscounting, they were overlooked and underserved by the federal government in 2020.

The decennial census plays a pivotal role in shaping our nation's future. For Clearfield City, an accurate 2030 Census will mean fair access to federal funding, equitable representation, and reliable data to guide our community's growth. Our city cannot afford to deal with another disastrous miscount, and we know there are many smaller cities with fewer resources that could not, and did not, have its miscount corrected. Without adequate preparation and funding, the risk of another miscount looms large with consequences that ripple through every corner of our country, most impacting the small and rural towns in America that make our country so great.

A Call to Keep the Census Non-Political

I urge the Committee to remember that the census is enshrined in the Constitution as a fundamental tool for governance. It must remain non-partisan to maintain the public's trust and ensure its data reflects reality, not political agendas. A politicized census risks undermining its accuracy and legitimacy, compromising its utility for cities, states, and the federal government alike.

Smaller and rural cities bear the brunt of the consequences for the politicization of fundamental government services, such as the Census. Our residents, many of whom work at the neighboring Air Force base and on farms, just want to be counted and have access to the same resources as their counterparts in neighboring cities.

We all want the best and most accurate census possible. And most city leaders, regardless of political party, will agree that improvements over the 2020 Census are necessary. The purpose of the constructive criticism coming from cities and towns, and summarized in my testimony, is to help the Census help our hometowns.

In conclusion, I urge this Committee to advocate for robust funding of the Census Bureau and to safeguard its integrity as a non-partisan institution. Clearfield City and communities across the nation depend on a fair and accurate count to thrive. If you have any questions or would like to learn more about the specific consequences of the 2020 undercount to cities and towns in your individual states and Congressional Districts, I urge you to reach out to the National League of Cities (NLC). I encourage you to view NLC as a non-partisan resource for information and analysis on the Census.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to ensuring the U.S. Census fulfills its essential role.