

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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### MEMORANDUM

September 4, 2020

**To: Members of the Committee on Oversight and Reform**

**Fr: Committee Staff**

**Re: Full Committee Hearing on “Providing the Census Bureau with the Time to Produce a Complete and Accurate Census”**

On **Thursday, September 10, 2020, at 11:00 a.m., in room 2154 of the Rayburn House Office Building and over WebEx**, the Committee will hold a hearing on the need for legislative action to extend the statutory deadlines for delivering apportionment and redistricting data from the Census Bureau to the President.

#### I. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

On April 13, 2020, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham issued a statement warning that Congress needed to pass urgent legislation to ensure the accuracy of the Census in the wake of the coronavirus crisis. They wrote:

In light of the COVID-19 outbreak, the U.S. Census Bureau is adjusting 2020 Census Operations in order to ... Ensure a complete and accurate count of all communities. ... In order to ensure the completeness and accuracy of the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau is seeking statutory relief from Congress of 120 additional calendar days to deliver final apportionment counts.<sup>1</sup>

That same day, Secretary Ross asked Congress to extend two specific statutory Census deadlines: the date to deliver apportionment data to the President, from December 31, 2020, to April 30, 2021; and the date to deliver redistricting data to the states, from March 30, 2021, to July 31, 2021. He also informed Congress that the Administration was extending its own internal deadline for field operations from July 21, 2020, to October 31, 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> Census Bureau, *Press Release: U.S. Department of Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and U.S. Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham Statement on 2020 Census Operational Adjustments Due to COVID-19* (Apr. 13, 2020) (online at [www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2020/statement-covid-19-2020.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2020/statement-covid-19-2020.html)).

In response, the House passed statutory extensions on May 15 as part of the Heroes Act.<sup>2</sup> Chairwoman Maloney introduced stand-alone legislation on May 27, the Fair and Accurate Census Act.<sup>3</sup> Senators Kamala Harris and Brian Schatz introduced the Senate companion on June 23.<sup>4</sup>

In late July, the Trump Administration abruptly reversed course. Instead of supporting legislation to extend the deadlines, it cut back operations aimed at reaching the hardest to count communities. On August 3, 2020, Director Dillingham announced that the Census Bureau would cut short Self-Response and Nonresponse Follow-up by a full month, and data processing operations by 60 days.<sup>5</sup>

On September 2, 2020, the Committee released an internal Census Bureau analysis that was presented to Secretary Ross on August 3, 2020—the same date the Administration announced that it was cutting short field and data processing operations. The document indicates that forcing the Census Bureau to complete the 2020 Census without extending the statutory deadlines could significantly degrade its accuracy and completeness.<sup>6</sup>

This hearing will analyze the Census Bureau’s new truncated operational timeline and the risks it poses to the accuracy and completeness of the 2020 Census. It also will examine the need to extend statutory deadlines to allow the Census Bureau to produce a full, fair, and accurate 2020 Census. The Committee has both oversight and legislative jurisdiction over the Census. House Rule X, clause 1(n) assigns to the Committee legislative jurisdiction over “Population and demography generally, including the Census.”<sup>7</sup>

## II. WITNESSES

### **J. Christopher Mihm**

Managing Director, Strategic Issues Team  
Government Accountability Office

### **John H. Thompson**

Former Director  
Census Bureau (2013-2017)

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Roll Call Vote on Passage for H.R. 6800 (May 15, 2020) (208 yeas, 199 nays).

<sup>3</sup> H.R. 7034.

<sup>4</sup> S. 4048

<sup>5</sup> Census Bureau, *Press Release: Statement from U.S. Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham: Delivering a Complete and Accurate 2020 Census Count* (Aug. 3, 2020) (online at [www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2020/delivering-complete-accurate-count.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2020/delivering-complete-accurate-count.html)).

<sup>6</sup> Census Bureau, *Operational and Processing Options to Meet Statutory Date of December 31, 2020 for Apportionment* (Aug 3, 2020) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/documents/Census%20Slide%20Deck%20Aug%203%202020.pdf>).

<sup>7</sup> House rule X, clause 1(n).

**Additional Witnesses (TBD)**

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