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Testimony of

National Association of Latino Elected
And Appointed Officials Educational Fund

to the

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Oversight and Reform
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

“Getting Counted: The Importance of the Census to State
and Local Communities”

May 28, 2019

LaGuardia Community College
New York City, New York



Chair Raskin and members of the Subcommittee: On behalf of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding Census 2020. A complete and accurate count of all New York residents in the next decennial enumeration will help ensure that the state obtains the representation it deserves in our nation's democracy, and the resources required to meet vital community needs.

NALEO Educational Fund is the nation's leading nonprofit organization that facilitates the full participation of Latinos in the American political process, from citizenship to public service. Our Board members and constituency encompass the nation's more than 6,700 Latino elected and appointed officials – with more than 176 coming from New York - and include Republicans, Democrats and Independents. NALEO Educational Fund has maintained an office in New York City since 1993, and today has staff based in the city providing naturalization, voter engagement, Census outreach and constituency services programs.

NALEO Educational Fund is a national leader in Census outreach, community education and policy development. Since the 1990 Census, our organization has conducted outreach campaigns to promote the full and accurate count of the Latino community. Together with media and community-based organizational partners, we have launched *¡HAGASE CONTAR!* (“*Make Yourself Count!*”) and *¡HAZME CONTAR!* (“*Make Me Count!*”) campaigns to drive response to the 2020 Census through dissemination of community education materials; promotion of a toll-free Census information hotline staffed by bilingual operators; technical assistance for community groups; and direct assistance to Latino residents with completing Census forms. As part of this effort, NALEO Educational Fund is coordinating a Census outreach campaign within the Latino community in New York City, and is hoping to expand its efforts throughout the state.

NALEO Educational Fund also has decades of experience working closely with its Latino elected official constituency, other government officials and partner organizations to promote public policies to achieve the most accurate count possible of the nation's population. NALEO Educational Fund has been a member of the U.S. Census Bureau's national advisory committees since 2000, and currently sits on the Bureau's National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic and Other Populations. NALEO Educational Fund is also the co-chair of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights' Census Task Force, and of the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda's Census Task Force.

Why the Decennial Census Matters for New York

Robust statewide outreach to ensure a full count of the residents in the state of New York is needed because the stakes are so high for the state. New York State receives more than \$73 billion in Census-directed federal funding each year. This money pays for crucial efforts that include early childhood education, and health care for the elderly and for the state's most disadvantaged children. For each New York resident not counted in a decennial Census, the state loses a portion of its fair share of federal resources for the ensuing decade. We have attached to the testimony our May 2019 report of the National Latino Commission on Census 2020, which was established in 2018 to help ensure a fair and accurate count of the Latino community and all of America's residents in Census 2020. One of the Commission's hearings was held in New York City, on November 28, 2018, and the report includes testimony from New York leaders about the importance of Census 2020 for the fair allocation of critical resources needed by New York State and its local communities

In addition, at the beginning of the 20th century, New York's robust population growth relative to other states resulted in significant gains in its number of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives after each decade's reapportionment. Between the reapportionment after 1900 and the reapportionment after 1940, the number of New York's seats in the House grew from 37 to 45. However, in subsequent decades, the population increases in other states outpaced those of New York, and following the 2010 reapportionment, the number of New York's seats in the House had declined to 27. Demographers predict that New York could lose at least one seat in the House after 2020. The state could suffer a more serious loss because of numerous factors which are creating challenges to obtaining a full count of New Yorkers. These include a population which significant concentrations of "hard-to-count residents;" the adoption of a citizenship question known to depress survey responses from households that include noncitizens; and reduced funding for the Census Bureau during the years leading up to federal FY 2019 which has forced the cancellation or delay of outreach to schools and teachers, dissemination of multilingual advertising, and other effective partnership and communications efforts.

Finally, good governance and economic development in New York require good data. Businesses need accurate and up-to-date information to capitalize upon opportunities, just as elected officials and community advocates need to understand where and how expansion is fueling need for schools, roads, and other infrastructure.

The 2020 Census of New York Is At High Risk

The accuracy of the Census Bureau's count of New Yorkers in 2020 is in jeopardy due to prolonged insufficient Congressional funding for sound preparations, and adoption of untested last-minute changes to Census materials. The state and its local communities must embrace opportunities to invest in increasing Census response, or they will suffer the negative effects of problems facing the decennial count. New York is already persistently undercounted, with about 148,000 net individuals missed in the 2010 Census.

To modernize its methods and cut costs, the Census Bureau proposed a number of significant changes for the 2020 Census earlier this decade. The Bureau hoped to collect responses online, automate hiring and task assignment functions, and use databases of administrative records, satellite imagery, and other resources to update its address list and to replace in-person visits to non-responding households. Thus, its plans called for a smaller temporary workforce and fewer field offices.

Although the Bureau did complete some research between FY2012 and FY2018, Congress repeatedly underfunded its budget requests, and forced the Bureau to cancel or significantly reduce the scope of survey tests planned for some of the most challenging places to enumerate, including Puerto Rico and reservations in North and South Dakota and Washington. The agency therefore lost the opportunity to assess and improve upon its communications with Spanish-dominant residents living in rural areas. In addition, development of critical IT infrastructure fell behind schedule and ran over cost projections, while research revealed significant potential inaccuracies in administrative records upon which the Bureau planned to rely. Funding shortfalls and the imperative of re-budgeting to pay for systems development have led to the delay or abandonment of programs that would have ameliorated persistent undercounting of young children, Latinos, African Americans, families that include noncitizens, and people who speak languages other than English.

New York's population includes large shares of members of undercounted groups, who are increasingly likely to be missed by a 2020 Census that has been hamstrung by insufficient Congressional and Presidential support. It is particularly crucial that New York and its localities obtain a full count of the Latino community. Latinos are the state's second largest population group, and according to Census 2017 American Community Survey data (1-year estimates), nearly one of every five New Yorkers (19%) are Latino. In many of New York State's localities, Latinos are the largest population group and comprise a much larger share of the population. Thus, there cannot be

an accurate enumeration of New York’s population without a fair and accurate count of the Latino community,

Research also reveals that the 2010 Census missed approximately 21,000 Latino children age zero to four in New York State, and two of New York’s boroughs – Brooklyn and Manhattan – are among the top 15 counties in nation with higher undercount of very young Latino children (6,000 each). There were notable net undercounts of very young Latino children in 2010 in the Borough of Queens (5,000) and Suffolk County (3,000). However, the Census Bureau has scaled back its planned 2020 school-based outreach program and advertising aimed at increasing reporting about our youngest residents. Because the Bureau will not do everything it should to fix this known problem, its count of young New York residents unlikely to improve, and may worsen.

Last-minute changes are further disrupting the Census Bureau’s plans and hurting its prospects of accurately counting New York residents. The most concerning of these is the Commerce Department’s directive to ask every Census respondent about his or her citizenship. The proposed citizenship question was not timely requested and has not been field-tested in a Census-like environment, but every relevant indicator – from results of opinion surveys to response rates on past Census questionnaires – shows that the question’s inclusion will significantly reduce Census participation rates. For example, Latinos dropped out of a 2016 survey sample at precisely the moment they encountered citizenship-related questions at more than three times the rates of non-Hispanic whites. Moreover, Census researchers and field representatives have published a series of reports in 2017 and 2018 finding that noncitizens are expressing fear and refusing to respond to Census questionnaires at unprecedented rates; in the words of one Census employee, “Three years ago it was so much easier to get respondents compared to now because of the government changes...and trust factors...Three years ago I didn’t have problems with the immigration questions.” Five Census Bureau economists also found evidence suggesting that a Census 2020 citizenship question would lead to lower response rates, resulting in higher field costs and lower-quality data.

Unfortunately, because the Commerce Department forced this change over the Census Bureau’s counter-recommendation at the last possible moment before the final questionnaire’s due date, the Bureau has no time left to test messaging or other means of mitigating the question’s negative effect on Census response rates.

New York and its Localities Need a Robust Census 2020 Outreach Effort, Including Funding for Community-Based Organizations and Ethnic Media Educational Outreach

There are no second chances in the decennial Census, and New York State and its localities must take action to ensure that the weighty challenges encountered by the Census Bureau between 2012 and the present do not impair the 2020 count of their residents or cost them state resources, representation, and economic opportunity for a decade to come. In particular, the Census Bureau is facing challenges to sustaining a local community presence commensurate to its efforts around the 2010 Census. The Bureau may delay or cancel some advertising and community outreach activities, and intends to open fewer offices and employ fewer enumerators than in 2010. While federal funding provided for FY 2019 may mitigate some of these challenges, the Bureau's reduced presence and activity will lessen the effort aimed at earning respondents' understanding of and trust in the Census. Unless New York state and its localities do the crucial work that the Census Bureau cannot, less effort to promote the Census will result in fewer New York residents counted in 2020.

Robust statewide and borough-wide outreach efforts will help ensure that every New York resident participates in the 2020 enumeration. These efforts will require that a significant amount funding be allocated to community-based organizations (CBOs) who are trusted by hard-to-count communities. CBOs are best-positioned to know the messages which will resonate with these communities and mobilize residents to participate in Census 2020. They have staff with the cultural competency and linguistic skills to help surmount the lack of trust members of hard-to-count communities may have in providing information to the government. They are familiar with the residential arrangements of community members who live in non-traditional housing, and can effectively reach those who have been displaced by economic challenges; and persons living in add-on or remodeled structures which are not the typical living spaces for many homes.

In addition, many CBOs have contact with hard-to-count residents by providing health, education, or childcare or other services that help improve the quality of life for these residents and their families. Thus, these CBOs are well-positioned to incorporate Census outreach effectively and efficiently in their day-to-day activities. Many of these CBOs also have extensive experience in conducting outreach and community education with respect to the services they already provide, and can augment their existing infrastructure to include work on Census 2020.

Finally, many CBOs have one of the most critical resources needed to effectively engage residents in the 2020 enumeration – the trust of the community members they serve. In light of the public dialogue around the addition of the citizenship question to Census 2020, and widespread fear about

how the federal government will use the information residents provide, CBOs are the trusted messengers who can best reach and engage these community members. We acknowledge that resources provided to the State of New York and its localities could effectively be used in part for activities where state/local government coordination and consistency of message would be helpful – for example, in the production of some basic outreach materials, in helping to disseminate real-time information about response rates as it becomes available from the Census Bureau, and in helping to keep CBOs informed about efforts throughout the state. However, a significant portion of the investment made by the state in Census 2020 outreach should be directed towards CBOs, who can work in partnership with state and local governments on the foregoing efforts.

In addition, local ethnic media outlets should play a critical role in Census 2020 outreach efforts. Spanish-language media have a long tradition of providing information on public affairs and civic participation to their audiences. They can be trusted and knowledgeable partners who will inform and educate Latinos about the importance of Census 2020. They have the ability to focus on issues and concerns that are relevant to local communities, and highlight how participation in Census 2020 will improve life for Latinos in those communities. These media will also be able to combat the dissemination of rumors or misinformation, particularly regarding the citizenship question.

Conclusion

In the interest of securing the New York's due share of funding and influence, we support and encourage the state and its localities to invest robustly in community based outreach and ethnic media educational campaigns to ensure that all New Yorkers, many of them Latinos, will be counted. This modest investment in Census outreach will pay exponentially increasing dividends in the next decade.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit this testimony.

