

**Testimony of Dr. Gail O. Mellow, President of LaGuardia Community College**  
**Before the**  
**Congress of the United States House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Oversight & Reform: Subcommittee on Civil Rights & Civil Liberties**  
**Regarding**  
**Getting Counted: The Importance of the Census to State and Local Communities**  
**Tuesday, May 28, 2019**  
**LaGuardia Community College**

On behalf of our 50,000 students, and our faculty and staff, I want to welcome our Members of Congress to LaGuardia Community College. We are honored to host you today and specifically want to thank our fantastic representative, Carolyn Maloney, for all she does on behalf of our community.

It is most appropriate that you have decided to hold this hearing at this college. LaGuardia Community College represents what is unique and gorgeous about America. We are a community of students and scholars who, as our school's logo, says, "Dare to Do More." As we are located in Queens, the most diverse county in America, we are arguably the most diverse college campus in the nation. Our students represent 150 different nations; 96 different languages are spoken. When one enters our classrooms, you encounter students from across the globe---students born in China and Bangladesh, Ecuador and Colombia, Ghana and Israel.

It is unprecedented in the history of our world to see a collection of our humanity come together in this way. It allows for learning from people's experiences in ways that enrich us all and fuels the creativity, entrepreneurship and dynamism that makes America great. Our students come to the U.S, come to LaGuardia, and become our nation's nurses, teachers, accountants and small business owners. Our work here at the college, and at community colleges across the nation, provide the education and training that people need to succeed in today's economy, while helping them also become more learned and active members of our democracy.

The census is of fundamental importance to the workings of our nation. It is, first and foremost, how we apportion seats in Congress. It acts to drive where government resources get directed and provides essential information for research purposes.

From the perspective of this college president, and not being an expert on the census, I can offer three recommendations for your consideration.

- 1) **Do No Harm:** The census must achieve its primary objective of obtaining an accurate count of all people living in the United States. It's a snapshot in time, but we have to ensure that do not adopt approaches that may undermine gaining that accurate count. The Census needs to be carefully crafted, tested and disseminated in ways that reassure census-takers, as well as communities that historically have been under-represented in the census, to complete the census. Making a priority of an accurate and comprehensive count should be the driving force in our approach to the census.
- 2) **Empower Communities:** We know that access to information, and the ability and willingness of people to complete government forms, is not equal. We can all imagine groups—rural residents, the homeless, recent immigrants—being . Government resources need to be mobilized to ensure an accurate and comprehensive count. And government should work with community partners, including community colleges, to spread the word that the Census is safe and easy to complete.

- 3) Tap Community Colleges—Our students are ready and willing to help ensure an accurate count. Community colleges have deep reach into communities and, along with other partners—religious institutions, human service providers, housing organizations, libraries and others—can be on the frontlines publicizing and assisting in census outreach. Use us!

Again, I want to express my thanks to you for visiting us at LaGuardia and for convening this important hearing.