



Legislation Text

File #: 180316, Version: 0

Authorizing the Committee on Law and Government to hold hearings on the Decennial 2020 Census.

WHEREAS, Every decade since 1790, as required by the Constitution, the federal government has undertaken a census of its people, the accuracy and fairness of which serves the interests of both political parties and of every citizen. The decennial count is used to apportion seats in the House of Representatives and set the boundaries of congressional districts. It determines how tens of billions of dollars in federal aid are divvied up; and

WHEREAS, the Census provides important data for the analysis and appraisal of the changing patterns of rural/urban movement and concentration, the development of urbanized areas, geographical distribution of the population according to such variables as occupation and education, its socio-economic characteristics and labor force; and

WHEREAS, it also aids in decision making processes of the private sector. Population size and characteristics influence the location of businesses and services that satisfy the needs of the target population. The decennial census constitutes the principal source of records for use as a sampling frame for the household surveys during the years between censuses; and

WHEREAS, The 10-year cycle census requires consistent annual investments in new approaches and technologies, followed a spending ramp up, which includes extensive testing, hiring and publicity in the final few years to implement everything needed for census day and the extensive follow-up of those who haven't answered out the 10-question survey. For the past few years, Congress has appropriated less than the agency had requested, forcing officials to eliminate some exercises and skimp on preparations; and

WHEREAS, Congress passed its spending bill giving the Census Bureau \$2.814 billion in the current fiscal year. The appropriation tops, by more than \$1 billion, the \$987 million Commerce Secretary Ross said the 2020 census needed. Of that total amount, \$2.544 billion goes into the account that funds the 2020 headcount and the American Community Survey. In addition, noting that 70% of the costs of the decennial census come in the final 2 years, legislators appear to have made a down payment on that total in the 2018 budget; and

WHEREAS, Funding problems forced the Census Bureau to cancel its main field tests of census methods in rural and suburban areas in 2017 and 2018. That leaves the bureau with little chance to detect and correct flaws in its many procedures and systems. Such failure to fully test and fine tune new methods such as the Bureau's plans to use administrative data, including from the U.S. Postal Service, to remove vacant addresses from the list of unresponsive homes that census takers will visit, might lead to misidentifying some buildings as vacant and neglect to follow up on them; and

WHEREAS, The 2020 census will be the first to let households respond online, which should increase participation and limit costs, but could also widen the gap in response rates. In October 2017, The Leadership Conference Education Fund and the Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality (GCPI) released "Counting Everyone in the Digital Age: The Implications of Technology Use in the 2020 Decennial Census for the Count

of Disadvantaged Groups”. The report addresses how proposed Internet and automation technologies will affect 2020 Census enumeration for groups at risk of being undercounted. Many minority groups, as well as the elderly, have low Internet access rates and funding of non-Internet-based efforts such as initial outreach, telephone-based response options, and in-person visits to bridge the digital divide for all of these populations is crucial; and

WHEREAS, Budget short falls have impacted census partnerships and outreach to large corporations and community groups. Late last year only 40 employees, where it should have been 100 to 200, were focusing on working with clergy members, corporations and other community leaders who assist in driving home the importance of participating in the count. By 2020, there should be 4,000 to 6,000 partner specialists in place. Plans to test a range of local outreach and messaging strategies to minimize undercounting have either not been initiated or stalled; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Constitution requires a count of all people living in the United States, whether they are citizens or noncitizens, born in the United States or in another part of the world. Recent Census Bureau focus groups have documented a heightened level of concern about confidentiality in completing the census, particularly in immigrant communities. This may only be compounded by adding a citizenship question to the census, thereby potentially creating a chilling effect on census response rates; and

WHEREAS, Ninety-nine percent of the state’s prison cells are outside the City, yet forty percent of the state’s prisoners are from Philadelphia county. Use of the data derived from this long-standing flaw, oft times referred to a “prison-based gerrymandering”, is utilized to draw legislative districts. The “usual residence” rule, instead of tabulating incarcerated persons as residents of the community where they resided prior to incarceration creates serious problems whose repercussions will be felt far beyond the 2020 census; and

WHEREAS, Failure to prepare, and execute before the once-a-decade population count, will force the Census Bureau to shortchange 2020 Census operations designed to improve accuracy and lead to a result that deprives all equal political representation and access to their fair share of public and private resources; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Does hereby authorize the Committee on Law and Government to hold hearings on the decennial 2020 Census.