

Legislation Text

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Urging United States Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross to adopt the recommendations of The U.S. Conference of Mayors on the 2020 Census and its impact on municipalities.

WHEREAS, America's city leaders share Commerce Secretary Ross' commitment to a full and fair 2020 Census as the accuracy and fairness of it serves the interests of all political parties and of every citizen. In addition to apportionment of seats in the House of Representatives and drawing of political districts at the federal, state, and local levels, census data affects the distribution of billions of federal dollars annually to local communities for infrastructure and vital services such as new roads, schools, and emergency services; and

WHEREAS, According to the article "Mayors alarmed by unprecedented challenges ahead of 2020 Census" by Ryan Johnston, mayors from both parties have long held the census to be vital for constructing policy on virtually every local issue. They say past censuses have undercounted cities, leaving them shortchanged when the federal government hands out funding based on population size; and

WHEREAS, Congress has required the Census Bureau to spend no more on the 2020 Census than it did on the 2010 Census and, considering this, it is attempting to adapt through a greater reliance on technology and state and local assistance. In their letter, the U.S. Conference of Mayors noted that Secretary Ross requested \$187 million additional funding in fiscal year 2018 for the Census Bureau to improve the scalability and cyber security of the census IT system. "The 2020 Census will include new internet and telephone response methods, the letter adds, so such an investment will be critical to maximizing responses"; and

WHEREAS, No additional funding request for the Integrated Partnership and Communications program, which is vital to creating avenues for people who may not have the resources to respond otherwise, was proposed. The U.S. Conference of Mayors cited this program as being essential to keeping long-term census costs in check, given the growing barriers to a successful census. Factors that could depress self-response rates include the perceived, and real cyber-security risks and threats; the digital divide affecting rural, low income, minority, and older households; growing climate of fear among immigrants and anti-government sentiments; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Conference of Mayors has urged Secretary Ross to work with Congress to ensure that the FY 2018 omnibus appropriations bill include the adjusted allocation and additional funds to increase the number of Partner Specialists in 2018, enhance messaging research and testing and provide for a larger field footprint for the Bureau's Nonresponse Follow-Up operations; and

WHEREAS, The Census Bureau has a long history of exceptional leadership, with a demonstrated commitment to protecting confidentiality and operating with transparency, which has bolstered the confidence of the American people in the belief these essential tenets will be upheld; and

WHEREAS, In a letter to Commerce Secretary Ross, Senators Cory Booker (NJ) and Brian Schatz (HI), sharing sentiments akin to those of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, wrote: "The person charged with operational of the governmental undertaking responsible for apportionment in our government's highest legislative body should be committed to fair and accurate representation for all Americans"; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Conference of Mayors “urge[d] the administration to put forward candidates for Census Director and Census Bureau Deputy Director who will continue the tradition of non-partisan, experienced, and strong leadership. Any nomination or appointment that would undermine the credibility of the Bureau’s role as a fundamentally nonpartisan statistical agency will further erode already fragile public trust and confidence in the integrity of the 2020 Census and, indeed the objectivity of all Census Bureau statistics”; and

WHEREAS, In December 2017, the Department of Justice (“DOJ”) requested of the Bureau that a question about citizenship be added to the 2020 Census. DOJ’s argument in favor of the addition was that such additional data was necessary for carrying out the mandates of the Voting Rights Act of 1965; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Conference of Mayors’ letter cites numerous reasons for rejecting that request, including jeopardizing the validity of the operational tests already conducted, calling into question outreach and partnership strategies currently in place for different content that would require changes in training, execution as well as logistical and cost implications associated with it; and

WHEREAS, There is tremendous bipartisan agreement that the addition of an intrusive and untested citizenship question this late would lower self-response rates among both non-citizens and citizens thereby increasing non-response follow-up field costs, without increasing accuracy, and heighten privacy concerns around the census; and

WHEREAS, The U.S. Conference of Mayors urges Commerce Secretary Ross to reject the Department of Justice’s request to add a citizenship question to the decennial census and to ensure that the Census Bureau can focus its time and resources on accurately finalizing and executing the current census; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Council does hereby urge United States Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross to adopt the recommendations of the U.S. Conference of Mayors on the 2020 Census and its impact on Municipalities.