

CONGRESS: It's Up to You! #SaveOurCensus
Setting the record straight on extending the 2020 Census deadlines

Unless Congress steps in now to save the census, the loss to the nation for the next decade will be incalculable. A rushed census could lead to misallocation of political representation, government funding, and private sector investment in every state and community. If the remaining counting and data processing operations are not thorough, communities most in need of resources to improve quality of life and standards of living will not receive their fair share for the next decade. Accurate data from the 2020 Census are critical to informed decision-making and resource/investment allocation by the public and private sectors, including preparation for and recovery from natural disasters and public health crises.

Failure to push back the statutory reporting deadlines is forcing the Census Bureau to *cut short 2020 Census counting, data processing, and quality check operations.*

- ➔ "Completing" the count of 100% of homes does not mean the census is accurate. In fact, more people could be missed or counted in the wrong place in a rushed operation because the bureau must enumerate more households using less reliable information from neighbors, administrative records, and statistical methods.
- ➔ The shortened timeline is compressing vital quality check and data processing activities **from the usual five months into three months.** *The GAO told the House Oversight and Reform Committee at a recent hearing (9/10/20) that compressing data processing would compromise the quality and accuracy of census results.* For example, the Bureau won't have time to remove duplicate counts.
- ➔ Senior career Bureau officials said unequivocally and repeatedly in July that it was too late to finish robust census operations and report initial results by the current statutory deadline of Dec. 31, 2020. In a court filing on 9/11/20, the senior official overseeing the 2020 Census said the bureau is facing significant barriers to finishing data collection by September 30 due to COVID-19 resurgences, natural disasters (hurricanes and wildfires), and other factors outside of their control.

What can Senators and Representatives do?

- ➔ Extend the reporting deadlines for apportionment data (from 12/31/20 to 4/30/21) and redistricting data (from 4/1/21 to 7/31/21), as Commerce Secretary Ross —with the president's support — requested in April.
- ➔ Require counting operations to continue through Oct. 31.
- ➔ **Cosponsor the bipartisan, bicameral 2020 Census Deadline Extensions Act** (the Schatz/Murkowski/Sullivan bill, S. 4571, and the Young/Gallego bill, H.R. 8250)

BACKGROUND

On Sept. 5, a federal district court in California issued a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) prohibiting the U.S. Census Bureau from implementing a "rushed" census plan that would end data collection on Sept. 30. The administration precipitated the accelerated timeline in early August by abandoning —without explanation or notice —its previous request for Congress to push back the statutory reporting deadlines for apportionment data and redistricting data in light of significant

disruption and delays in every census operation due to the coronavirus pandemic.ⁱ The judge extended the TRO until Sept. 24; there is a Sept. 22 hearing on plaintiffs' motion for a Preliminary Injunction in the case of *National Urban League et al v. Wilbur Ross et al.* (Northern District of California).

➔ **Documents uncovered in that case show that Commerce Secretary Ross ignored clear warnings from senior, expert Census Bureau officials that a curtailed census could produce results of "unacceptable quality" with "fatal flaws" in the numbers. One career official circulated a memo internally titled, "Curtailing census operations will result in a census that is of unacceptable quality." Nevertheless, in late July, Ross ordered the bureau to cut short census operations and data processing. He gave them four days to give him an accelerated census plan.**

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