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Asian Americans Advancing Justice |  
AAJC

August 1, 2018

Ms. Jennifer Jessup

Departmental Paperwork Clearance Officer

Department of Commerce

Room 6616

14<sup>th</sup> and Constitution Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20230

RE: Comments on Proposed Information Collection on 2020 Census, Docket # USBC-2018-0005

Dear Ms. Jessup:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, and the undersigned organizations, we appreciate this opportunity to provide comments in response to the *Federal Register*

The Leadership Conference provides a powerful unified



## **Overview and summary**

There is one constitutional purpose for the decennial census: to apportion seats in the U.S. House of Representatives among the 50 states, based on

<sup>1</sup> The Supreme Court recently confirmed in an unanimous opinion in *Evenwel v. Abbott*, that

<sup>2</sup> To realize the

<sup>3</sup> the overarching goal of the decennial census *must be* an accurate count of all persons residing in the country. Any element of the census design and plan that might undermine or detract from the Census

With this fundamental, constitutional purpose in mind, **we urge the Census Bureau, in the strongest**



question on the decennial census to provide census block level citizenship voting age population

to the March 26, 2018 memorandum from Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross to Under Secretary for Economic Affairs Karen Dunn Kelley.



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Confidence



the citizenship question drives millions of people further into the shadows and away from the census, as we believe it will.

It also is worth noting that while

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acknowledge urgent concerns from the

Measurement, describing an

respondents in the pretesting surveys had participated in other bureau surveys and were being paid to participate in the pretests, research staff warned that people asked to participate in the actual census (the <sup>13</sup> Because  
 ter level of fear and reluctance to respond. The staff recommended scientifically robust research on the significant fears about confidentiality of census responses -immigrant policies that field employees documented in pretesting.

Census Bureau research staff conducted subsequent qualitative evaluations of the 2017 multilingual pretesting studies and additional studies done in 2018 (including in-language focus groups).<sup>14</sup> Notably, the phenomenon of fear census employees encountered occurred *before* public discussion of adding a citizenship question to the census form. Preliminary message testing found that many Spanish speakers appeared to be reassured that the 2020 Census would not ask questions related to immigration status, a finding that now must be considered unreliable. Furthermore, other Spanish speaking respondents were not swayed by statements that, by law, the Census Bureau could not share their answers with immigration enforcement agencies. And researche

While the research cited above was limited, it highlighted the likelihood that fears about how census participation could be used to harm immigrants and their families could adversely affect response rates and data quality concerns that service providers and advocates who work closely with immigrant populations have raised since the possibility of adding a citizenship question to the census surfaced in December 2017. *Incorrect or incomplete household rosters, in particular, are likely to reduce data quality, at best, and increase omissions and, therefore, the undercount, at worst.* Research staff noted these possible implications and recommended systematic, quantitative, and more current analysis of the reactions they had already documented.

Yet, the March 26, 2018 decision to add the question failed even to acknowledge the alarm sounded by

Bureau nor concerned stakeholders could document that the response rate would in fact decline

empirical evidence of such an effect on response rates. Shifting the burden of proof for adverse consequences on census accuracy to stakeholders, and suggesting that the absence of traditional in-depth Census Bureau research to assess the possibility of these consequences is evidence of no consequences,

<sup>13</sup> Memorandum for Associate Director for Research and Methodology prepared by the Center for Survey Measurement on

<sup>14</sup>

d at the annual conference

of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, Denver, CO, May 2018.

(<https://census.gov/content/dam/Census/newsroom/press-kits/2018/aapor/aapor-presentation-confidentiality.pdf>)



flies in the face of own standards and guidelines for statistical surveys.<sup>15</sup> In relevant part, those guidelines provide:

**Survey Response Rates**

**Standard 1.3:** Agencies must design the survey to achieve the highest practical rates of response, commensurate with the importance of survey uses, respondent burden, and data collection costs, to ensure that survey results are representative of the target population so that they can be used with confidence to inform decisions. *Nonresponse bias analyses must be conducted when unit or item response rates or other factors suggest th*



Act requires the Bureau to submit to Congress the topics and actual questions it will include, three and two years, respectively, before Census Day. It is highly risky to ask untested questions in the context of the complete 2020 Census design. There is a great deal of evidence that even small changes in survey question order, wording, and instructions can have significant, and often unexpected, consequences for the rate, q

question in the 2020 Census in its recommendations to Acting Census Director Ron Jarmin following the - nship  
adequate testing, about the implications for nonresponse (unit and item), implications for the cost, and were the lack of

because there is not clear evidence that adding the question would harm the census accuracy, this is not evidence that it will not. [T]he empirical evidence that was discussed by Sec. Ross came from data collected in a different data collection context, in a different political climate, before anti-immigrant attitudes were as salient and consequential

question from the ACS





Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

A Better Balance

AFSCME

AIDS United

American Association of People with Disabilities

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

American Federation of Teachers

American Library Association

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee

Anti-Defamation League

Arab American Institute

AshaKiran

Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum

Asian American Federation

Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC

Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote

Asian Law Alliance

Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

BiNet USA

Bisexual Organizing Project (BOP)

Black Voters Matter Fund

Bridgeport Caribe Youth Leaders

California Food Policy Advocates

California Women's Law Center

Center for American Progress

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

CHANGE Illinois

Children Now

Children's Defense Fund

Children's Defense Fund - Texas

Chinese American Citizens Alliance

Chinese for Affirmative Action

Chinese-American Planning Council



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Confidence



NASTAD

National Association of Social Workers

National Center for Lesbian Rights

National Center for Transgender Equality

National Congress of American Indians

National Consumers League

National Council of Churches

National Council of Jewish Women

National Disability Rights Network

National Education Association

National Employment Law Project

National Fair Housing Alliance

National Health Law Program

National Hispanic Media Coalition

National LGBTQ Task Force

National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health

National Women's Health Network

National Women's Law Center

Network of Myanmar American Association

New Jersey Institute for Social Justice

NICOS Chinese Health Coalition

OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates

Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance (OCAPICA)

Parent Voices

PC(USA) Office of Public Witness

People For the American Way

PolicyLink

Population Connection

Prison Policy Initiative

Public Citizen

Rock the Vote

SAAPRI - South Asian American Policy & Research Institute

Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Services, Immigrant Rights and Education Network (SIREN)

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)

Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)

Southern Coalition for Social Justice

SparkAction

State Voices

Steps Coalition

Texas Progressive Action Network

The Arc of the United States



August 1, 2018

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