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Administration Announcement to Cut Short the 2020 Census Count Puts Our Communities at Risk

For Immediate Release: August 5, 2020

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Columbus – Yesterday, the U.S. Census Bureau announced its plan to adjust census operations and cut short counting efforts by one month, ending on September 30th rather than October 31st. This means that Ohioans will have 30 fewer days to complete their census questionnaire and be counted and seen.

Tracy Nájera, Executive Director of the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio and representative of the Ohio Census Advocacy Coalition, released the following statement:

“The Trump Administration is once more taking actions that seek to undermine and affect the overall integrity and accuracy of the census. By taking actions that call into question who counts, reducing the efforts to make sure individuals are counted, and now diminishing the amount of time those individuals have to be counted, we are risking Ohio's ability to have a true count of all people living in our state.

Further, we risk living with inaccurate data for the next ten years – meaning that the Buckeye state is at risk of losing critical federal resources and having inaccurate data that will be used for decision making. An inaccurate count will also impact our voice in Congress for the next decade. Giving short shift to operations and the timeline to complete the count undermines the Census Bureau's constitutional mandate to count all individuals living in the United States.

It especially means that we will be further disenfranchising communities of color, young children, and others who have traditionally been undercounted in the decennial census. We must not let our communities be cheated of their opportunity to be counted and to be seen. We must not let our communities be cheated of critical resources they need for child care, health care, critical infrastructure, business loans, and support for education services. The Census Bureau must allow the time and space needed for a safe and accurate count. Congress must extend the 2020 census reporting deadlines in the next COVID-19 package.”



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This announcement comes as the Trump administration is abandoning its [previous request](#) to have Congress extend the statutory deadlines for reporting apportionment and redistricting data from the 2020 Census. While the House-passed HEROES Act extended these deadlines to protect the census and our democracy, the extension is currently missing from the Senate HEALS Act.

At the end of the day - a failed census is a failure of this administration in its constitutional duty to count every individual who lives in this country. The U.S. taxpayers have invested \$16 billion in the census and it's critical that we get what we paid for – an accurate count of all individuals who live in the United States. The Administration is proposing to put their thumb on the scale and undermine the allocation of trillions of dollars for the next decade – dollars that could be going to our schools, our communities, and our children and families who are struggling. Every state in the country, along with millions of people who have been shortchanged again and again – in our urban areas, our rural communities, in communities of color - will be told that they don't matter and they don't count. Ohio will lose out on funding and fair representation if the Census Bureau is forced to cut short its work and turn in an unfinished product.

BACKGROUND

Forcing the U.S. Census Bureau to rush the census in the middle of a pandemic is part of an intentional effort to sabotage the census to reflect a less diverse and inaccurate portrait of America. A rushed census shortchanges critical operations that count people of color, Native Americans, low-income people, and people experiencing homelessness. An inaccurate and incomplete count would skew Congressional representation, redistricting, and critical funding for every state in the country.

In light of significant delays and disruptions to 2020 Census operations due to the public health crisis, in April 2020, the administration with the advice and support of the Census Bureau, asked Congress to delay the December 31, 2020 deadline for transmitting the state population totals used for congressional apportionment to the president, to April 30, 2021.

At this moment in time, the administration is reversing course on this request, a decision which undermines the Census Bureau's plan to extend the census timeline to give the door-to-door counting operation the time, space, and protection needed to be implemented correctly, especially in the midst of a pandemic.

Rushing the timeline means putting communities and census workers at risk. We need time and flexibility to make operational adjustments to ensure a safe and effective 2020 Census.



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It has been well documented that the census bureau has requested additional time for field operations, due to COVID-19, so that it could finish and report initial results by the current statutory deadline of December 31, 2020.

Cutting census counting, including door knocking and self-response efforts short by a month and abandoning the request to extend the reporting deadlines, will force the bureau to rush counting operations, critical data review, processing, and tabulation.

Because of the pandemic, Ohio and the rest of the country are already behind the 2010 response rates. In Ohio, this means many of our major cities, Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, and Dayton and many of our rural areas are falling behind in their count and need additional support to make their communities count. In fact, over a third of the Appalachian region have reached fewer than 60% of residents. The census operations identified below were specifically created to target the communities historically missed by the census and are being shortchanged by the administration's decisions and they include:

- Door-to-door enumeration, the most labor-intensive operation of the 2020 Census, which attempts to conduct outreach to historically undercounted population groups and communities throughout the country;
- Special operations to hand-deliver census packets in rural and remote communities;
- Enumeration of people experiencing homelessness;
- Facilitating internet access in low self-response neighborhoods, including the congressionally-mandated Mobile Questionnaire Assistance operation.

A successful 2020 Census requires counting hard-to-count communities and effectively following-up with those who didn't respond on their own. The current pandemic is disrupting this outreach and the recent announcement by the Census Bureau Director will make it even more difficult to attain an accurate census count.

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About Children's Defense Fund-Ohio

The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

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