



March 15, 2019

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Departmental Lead PRA Officer
Office of the Chief Information Officer
Department of Commerce
14th and Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Submitted via <http://www.regulations.gov> (Docket # USBC-2018-0004)

RE: Comments on Proposed Information Collection on 2020 Census

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of the United States, we write to offer comments on the 2020 Census proposed information collection. We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments in response to the Federal Register's notice seeking comments on the 2020 Census Address Canvassing Operation.

We believe in a full, fair, and accurate census, as the Census is essential to all basic functions of our society. The collection of useful, objective data about our nation's demographics, housing, economy, and communities is vitally important. Not only is a nationwide census required by the Constitution, it is integral to our democracy, ensuring that district lines are fairly drawn, and appropriate resources are allocated. The federal government uses census-derived data to direct at least \$800 billion annually in federal assistance to states, localities, and families. The data also guides important community decisions affecting schools, housing, health care services, business investment, and much more. A Census undercount or miscount will compromise the lives of millions of people and will cost more money to rectify in the long run.

The Census Bureau has taken many steps over the decades to improve the accuracy of the count. The League has long been a partner in communities across the country to ensure that a complete and accurate census is conducted. We support the efforts to modernize the collection of federal data in a time of advanced technological capabilities. We also support relieving the cost burden on tax payers for the U.S. Census. But we must also be aware of the realities of counting certain communities of color, low-income populations, geographically hard-to-count constituencies, and young children. Unlike communities of non-Hispanic Whites, older Americans, and homeowners, these communities experience barriers to participation at a higher rate. These challenges are not novel, as decennial census activity in the past has grappled with these challenges as well. To achieve a full count of these communities and others, the Address Canvassing Operation must consider these barriers in order to achieve the constitutionally required fair and accurate census count.

To that end, information must be provided to communities, organizations, and groups that participate in Complete Count Committees. In addition, Get Out the Count campaigns must obtain materials to be able to accurately convey how and when households will participate in the basic census process. If adequate investment is not prioritized at the onset, building confidence and motivating participation of all communities, including those with hard to count individuals, will be an expensive process during the field phase of counting. In fact, the Fiscal Policy Institute estimated that community outreach efforts for the

2020 Census will cost anywhere from two-dollars to seventy-five dollars per person based on the level of outreach by state.¹ For community-based organizations, like the League of Women Voters, who work to reach hard to count communities, the information required to engage individuals will be needed as soon as possible.

Questions around the citizenship question remain in the courts and with Congress. The League believes including a citizenship question in the 2020 Census will cause participation to plummet and threaten the accuracy of the Census, and at least 2 sets of district court cases agree with us. Census data is used to draw state and congressional districts based on population. Per the U.S. Constitution and rulings from the U.S. Supreme Court, congressional districts are drawn based on the whole number of people. Thus, citizenship data, voter registration status, and age are not accounted for when congressional seats are apportioned. It is for this reason that the League is alarmed by the possible transfer of citizenship data outlined in section N of Docket # USBC-2018-0004. The alarming portion in Section N reads:

The Census Bureau intends to work with stakeholders, specifically “the officers or public bodies having initial responsibility for the legislative apportionment of each state,” to solicit feedback on the content of the prototype redistricting data file. If those stakeholders indicate a need for tabulations of citizenship data on the 2020 Census Public Law 94-171 Redistricting Data File, the Census Bureau will make a design change to include citizenship as part of that data, if collected.

The League believes that supplying citizenship data to the “officers or public bodies” in charge of redistricting is a violation of the data privacy rules that the Census Bureau is bound to uphold. Sharing this sensitive citizenship data with those drawing electoral maps would cause the representation of less diverse, rural communities to disproportionately rise, diminishing the representation of urban, immigrant-friendly areas.

The Census was designed to provide a fair, unbiased count of everyone living in the United States. It is not meant to be a political tool -- and it is certainly not meant to deprive individuals in vulnerable communities of their due representation. The harm caused by this decision would be irreversible. Communities that are already at a greater risk of being undercounted – people of color, young children, and low-income rural and urban residents – will suffer most. Including a citizenship question and transferring that data to state officials only seeks to continue undermining participation in the 2020 Census and threatens the overall census process that is vital to our democracy.

A full, fair and accurate census is critical for our communities and we implore the Department of Commerce to take the issues outlined in this letter into account when making decisions around this process.

On behalf of our more than 750 state and local affiliates and our 300,000 members and supporters across the country, we respectfully submit these comments. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the questions to be asked in the 2020 Census. If you have any questions about these comments, please contact Celina Stewart, Director of Advocacy and Litigation, at 202-843-0433 or cstewart@lww.org.

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¹ <http://fiscalpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/FPI-Brief-Census-Outreach-Funding.pdf>