



2020
SPRING

PUBLIC POLICY WATCH

CENSUS OUTREACH MUST GO ON



The 2020 census is underway, and a complete count is maybe even more critical now that we are in the midst of a pandemic. From school lunches to plans for highways and support for families in need, census results affect your community every day.

There is a lot at stake. The results will help determine how hundreds of billions of dollars in federal funding flow into communities. Census data informs how financial support is provided to states for Head Start and after-school programs, special education, Medicare and Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition

Assistance Program, water and waste disposal systems in rural communities, and hospitals and health clinics all over Arkansas.

The data is also used to determine the political representation on city councils, school boards, at the state legislature and our US House Districts.

And in times of need, including public health emergencies like the coronavirus pandemic, our state's officials use census data to predict the spread of disease through our communities. Likewise, when natural disasters strike, census data

helps first responders better identify where to go and who to help.

In Arkansas, an undercount of even one percent of our population — about 30,000 people — could result in the loss of nearly \$1 billion.

3 WAYS TO TAKE IT

Most households received their invitation to respond to the 2020 Census in March. If you didn't respond online or by phone before mid-April, you likely received a paper questionnaire in the mail. You can still take it online or by phone anytime after it arrives, and there is help available in many different languages.

WHO SHOULD BE COUNTED?

One person should respond for each home. That person must be at least 15 years old and should live in the home or place of residence themselves and know general information about each person living there.

LEADERS DOUBLING DOWN IN PANDEMIC

In communities across Arkansas, people are pulling together to ensure the basic needs of others are met. The coronavirus pandemic continues to expose large gaps in our social fabric as well as the fragility of the systems we all depend on to survive. It's also showing the strength of our communities. Our member groups and leaders are stepping into the whirlwind to tackle health, economic and other challenges.



CIVIL RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY

In Gould, a high number of covid-19 cases have been documented inside Cummins State prison, where nearly one-third of the state's coronavirus cases have been confirmed.

Last month, a coalition of civil rights groups, with assistance from grassroots prison reform group **decARcerate and the ACLU**, filed an emergency complaint against the state of Arkansas for "utter disregard" for CDC coronavirus health guidelines in state prisons. This endangers both inmates and the staff who work in the prisons, who then return home to their families in the community.

Other leaders are pressing to make sure our right to vote is protected in this crisis. **Indivisible Little Rock and Central Arkansas** are leading a campaign with allies to allow "no excuse" absentee voting for the November General Election. The proposal

was rejected in April's fiscal legislative session but the campaign goes on hoping that the Governor and lawmakers reconsider.

And immigrants' rights organization **Arkansas United** is hard at work ensuring that government responses and crisis aid literature is inclusive and accessible to non-English speaking Arkansans. They are helping their members address a myriad of other issues including worker safety concerns, accessing food and healthcare assistance if they've lost their jobs, and more.



THE ECONOMY

Marginalized communities have been hit especially hard, deepening inequities in access to necessities like food and housing.

Food insecurity is an especially pressing problem now. Leaders in several communities, like **Pear Byers** in Monticello and **Evelyn Thomas** in Strong, are

working hand-in-hand with allies like the **Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance** to make sure their communities have access to the nutritional resources they need to survive. Some feeding programs around the state are struggling to meet the demand and keep their staff and volunteers healthy enough to keep operating during the crisis.

Housing security is another huge need. As unemployment rates continue to climb, advocacy group **Arkansas Renters United** is spearheading a campaign to demand that Gov. Hutchinson enact a moratorium on evictions for the duration of the pandemic; cancellation of rent and mortgage payments for six months, with no debt accrued and no back pay owed; the enforcement of rent and mortgage forgiveness for missed payments; financial assistance for landlords who cancel rent through the relief fund; the suspension of all utility payments and shutoffs, and the housing of all unsheltered people.

Making sure people know how to access safety net programs and stimulus payments is another challenge. Leaders from groups like **Legal Aid of Arkansas, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families** (AACF), and the **Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association** (ACAAA) are ramping up outreach efforts to educate and advocate for impacted Arkansans who need help navigating state crisis benefit programs like unemployment, SNAP and WIC, Medicaid, housing and utility assistance, and aid for small business owners.



EDUCATION

Across the state, many students without access to high-speed internet at home were left to fend for themselves as the government shut down their school buildings and mandated distance learning. Many students are simply disappearing from school outreach efforts.

The Panel is engaging a broad set of leaders from across our communities, connecting them with allies like **AACF**, the **Arkansas Education Association**, and the **Out of School Network** to make sure students' needs are being met and to develop a plan for

recovery.

In Dumas and Marvell, leaders like **Alyce Love** and **Sylvia Moore** are working to ensure that schools are distributing classwork and information to students without internet access, making sure that rules and information about Arkansas' Alternative Method of Instruction (AMI) packets and academic advancement plans are clear.

Several of our communities have been hit by storm damage and power outages as well. Our leaders and organizers created phone trees to communicate and check in with one another, and mutual aid strategies to make sure people are getting the food, medication, and other essentials they need.

The crisis is challenging each one of us to build the solidarity we'll all need for an uncertain future. Organizing systems of community resilience now will also support us in other challenges down the road.

The Panel and **CFC** are working with our leaders across all of our issues and communities to develop a Covid-19 Response Plan that includes recommendations we need to implement now to mitigate the damage being done,

recovery recommendations for how we rebuild, and long term recommendations focused on equity and expanding opportunity. This is being driven largely by our caucuses which are: Civil Rights and Election Reform, Economic Justice, Education, Environment, and Public Health. Let us know if you'd like to participate.

We've created a page of local resources on our website and launched an educational webinar series to cover topics like crisis benefits, public health, education, and more.

The issues highlighted in this story make up only a fraction of the obstacles our communities are facing and of those yet to come. We encourage you to find ways to support your neighbors however you can at this time. If you need assistance in your community, please reach out to us — we're here to help!

Editor's Note: While Panel offices remain closed, all staff can be reached via email. Contact information is available at www.arpanel.org/boardstaff.

CENSUS OUTREACH MUST GO ON, CONT.

You should be counted where you were living and sleeping most of the time as of April 1, 2020.

If you are responding for your home, count everyone who lives and sleeps there most of the time as of April 1, 2020. This includes young children, foster children, roommates, and any family members or friends who are living with you, even temporarily.



Kara Wilkins of Arkansas Counts speaks on the impact of the Census.

If someone was staying with you on April 1 who doesn't have a usual home elsewhere, include them in your response.

CENSUS AND COVID

• If someone is staying with you temporarily due to the covid-19 situation, they should be counted where they usually live.

• For college students who lived on campus, the college will count them. Do not count them twice.

• College students who lived off campus should complete the Census form by email, mail or telephone. Be sure to include any roommates or other people living there.

In 2020, the Census Bureau will devote three days to counting people who are experiencing homelessness at shelters, on streets, in tent encampments and at soup kitchens across the country.

Census takers will also visit transitory locations including RV parks, marinas, hotels, and



campgrounds to conduct interviews with individuals using a paper questionnaire.

Those living in correctional residential facilities, federal detention centers, federal and state prisons, and local jails will also be counted at their facility. Patients in hospitals for routine stays should be counted at the residence where they live and sleep.

Since your response is required

by law, if you do not respond, the U.S. Census Bureau will follow up in person to collect your response.

Your information is secure and will never be shared. Federal law prevents the Census Bureau from sharing your information with law enforcement, and answers cannot be used to impact your eligibility for government benefits. Your answers are only

used to create statistics about our country.

The deadline to respond to the census is October 31.

If you have questions or need assistance, or if you'd like to host a virtual Census training in your community, we can help! Please reach out via phone at (870) 818-0977 or by email to panel@arpanel.org.



This is a critical year for elections at the state, local and national levels. Our groups are educating voters about key issues, ballot measures, and where candidates stand on key issues. South Arkansas staff facilitated forums in Gould, Monticello and Pine Bluff before spring primaries, with several more slated for fall. We're developing ways to conduct these forums online to comply with social distancing recommendations. Let us know if you'd like help hosting an event in your community!

COMMUNITY VOICES

On voting:

"The November election may seem months away — but given the uncertainty of the pandemic, that's actually not much time to adapt election procedures to help 1.7 million Arkansas voters vote safely during covid-19 recovery. County clerks need time to respond to and process absentee ballot applications. Postal unions need months to package mass mailings of ballot materials, especially in light of national demand.

— *Loriee Evans, Indivisible LRCA*

On housing security for renters:

"A record number of unemployment claims have been filed in Arkansas. Many people have yet to receive economic impact payments. Children are home from school. Covid-19 cases continue to rise. Widespread testing is not occurring, and people can spread the virus without even having symptoms. Evictions have continued to be filed in Arkansas over the last couple of months. It is unjust and short-sighted to turn people out of their housing during a pandemic, especially when they've lost their jobs through no fault of their own. We need to stop evictions now."

— *Neil Sealy, Arkansas Renters United*

On students:

"The education and nutrition of our students is of great concern. Parents and teachers are working together to promote student success, coordinating the pickup and drop off of classwork for each student, offering daily encouragement online, and creating ways to honor our 2020 seniors. We're also working with several local agencies to ensure every student is provided a meal, with pickup locations across the community.

— *Pear Byers, Monticello*

On students:

"The school district is serving breakfast and lunch four days a week. Students without internet access at home are completing assignments with paper packets, or online with open WiFi in the school parking lot. We're still encouraging constant hand washing, social distancing, temperature checks and the use of hand sanitizer."

— *Evelyn Thomas, Strong/Huttig*

PANEL PODCAST SPOTLIGHTS EQUITY

The Panel launched its new podcast! The Folding Chair will highlight guests who publicly support and advocate for causes and policies that support racial equity in Arkansas.

“The podcast was created to engage people in discussions about racial equity in an innovative way — to transform the negative thinking that discussing racial injustice is taboo and to take the next steps to close equity gaps in all communities,” Host Osyrus Bolly, the Panel’s Racial Equity Coordinator, said.

Each episode of The Folding Chair features new guests who share their personal journey in their field of work and identify the racial equity component in their causes.

The Folding Chair is unique because it gives listeners who may be unfamiliar with the individuals featured on the podcast an opportunity to learn more about the leaders in Arkansas who are working locally, regionally and nationally to provide groundwork for change and awareness.

The podcast's title, The Folding Chair, was inspired by a quote

from Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to the U.S. Congress and the first woman to run for president.

“Chisholm said ‘If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair,’ and each guest on The Folding Chair has essentially created space for themselves by insisting that their voices be heard, invitation or not,” Bolly added.

Featured guests include:

- **Dawn Jeffrey**, a community advocate who founded Nayborhood Activists in 2019 to help provide power to the people through information that can be used to create change in the community.

- **Lorenzo Lewis**, founder of The Confess Project, and Dr. Alexis Davis, clinical psychologist, and owner of BBLVK Jewel Podcast, Events and Marketing Collective.

- **Furonda Brasfield**, local attorney and executive director of Arkansas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty.

- **Kwami and Clarice Abdul-Bey**, Arkansas Peace and Justice Memorial Movement.

The Folding Chair is available to download or stream on Spotify, Apple Podcasts and Google Play.



From left to right: Dawn Jeffrey, Clarice Abdul-Bey, Kwami Abdul-Bey

**ARKANSAS
PUBLIC POLICY PANEL**

Putting the PUBLIC back in public policy since 1963

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COVID-19

WE'RE HERE TO HELP

For more help and additional resources on public health benefits during COVID-19, visit our website at **arpanel.org/crisis**.