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New Controversial Question on 2020 Census Will Leave Many Pa. Communities Undercounted

Inaccurate counts negatively affect federal funding for which communities may be eligible, from transportation initiatives to Head Start

HARRISBURG (March 27, 2018) – The U.S. Commerce Department on Monday announced it has decided to include a new controversial question about citizenship status in the 2020 U.S. Census, despite bipartisan opposition to adding it in at the last minute.

“Make no mistake: Pennsylvania communities will lose out on billions in federal aid because of undercounting as a result of this question,” said Erin Casey, executive director of Pennsylvania Voice, which staffs Keystone Counts to ensure a fair and accurate Census.

The Census Bureau conducts careful, costly research and testing over a period of many years to develop questions. This late addition is unnecessarily intrusive and untested.

Experts are unsure how households --- whether native or foreign-born, citizen or noncitizen --- will respond to a question asking about confidential personal information because of their concerns about how government authorities may use that information.

“Anything that disrupts the collection of useful, objective data about people, housing, our state and national economies, and the communities where our residents live jeopardizes a fair and accurate census,” she said.

Republican and Democratic administrations alike, as well as Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, have confirmed unequivocally that the U.S. Constitution requires a count of all persons living in the United States, regardless of citizenship or legal status, for the purpose of apportioning seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Every census since the first enumeration in 1790 has included citizens and non-citizens alike.

The count also is critical in ensuring the fair distribution annually of more than $589.7 billion from 16 large Census-guided programs to municipalities across the country. Funding derived by Census data include program areas such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), highway planning and construction, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, Head Start/Early Start, and more.

“Adding a new question on citizenship to the 2020 Census would disrupt preparations at a pivotal point in planning, increase census costs significantly, and, most importantly, jeopardize the accuracy of the 2020 Census by deterring many people from responding,” Casey said.

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Keystone Counts is a nonpartisan coalition of advocacy groups, service providers, and community organizations joined together to build an education and outreach effort for a fair and accurate 2020 census. For more information, visit www.KeystoneCounts.org.