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Contact: Erin Casey
P: 267-981-1855
E: ecasey@pavoice.org

Pa. Should Fund Census Efforts in 2019-20 Budget
Public funding needed for fair, accurate count to ensure state gets its fair share

HARRISBURG (May 20, 2019) – The nonpartisan coalition Keystone Counts today called on the administration and lawmakers to include funding the 2019-20 General Fund budget to support efforts to ensure a fair and accurate count in the 2020 census, which determines billions in federal aid to states and legislative representation nationwide.

The U.S. Constitution requires a count of all people living in the United States, regardless of citizenship or legal status, to apportion seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The census also ensures municipalities get their share of more than $883 billion in federal funds distributed each year for 55 large census-guided programs, according to the George Washington University Institute of Public Policy. Pennsylvania currently receives more than $39.2 billion annually through census-backed programs, meaning an undercount could cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars annually and affect congressional standing.

“To ensure a fair and accurate count, we need to act today --- and we need to act together. This isn’t a Republican or Democratic issue. This is about all of Pennsylvania,” said Erin Casey, executive director Keystone Counts. “What happens with this census becomes our reality for the next decade, and that could have serious repercussions if it isn’t done right.”

Casey is among the members appointed by Gov. Tom Wolf to serve on the bipartisan Census 2020 Complete Count Commission, which comprises 40 commissioners, government officials and community stakeholders, to coordinate the state’s involvement with the U.S. Census Bureau to ensure a fair and accurate count.

The commission’s funding committee is requesting state totaling an amount equal to $1 per person currently residing in the state. Other states like Illinois, New York, Maryland and California are allocating funds, understanding what an undercount could mean --- not just for fair political representation but also for adequate funding for health care, nutrition assistance, transportation, housing, education, child welfare programs and other community needs.
An undercount could affect Pennsylvania’s congressional standing. Pennsylvania easily could lose one or more of its 18 representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives, which could mean the loss of one or more of the state’s 20 electoral votes. The census also has a direct impact on how new Pennsylvania state house and senate districts are redrawn in 2021.

The census is intended to be a complete count of everyone in the country, but there are historically undercounted populations --- children, immigrants, people of color, and low-income households --- that are more likely to be missed. Rural populations are more difficult to count than urban areas because fewer rural residents return census forms sent by mail, and they are less likely to have Internet access in 2020 when the Census Bureau is expecting the majority of households to fill out their census questionnaire online.

Public funding is essential to bolster state efforts to ensure these populations are not left out and Pennsylvania doesn’t fall behind.

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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.*