

Population Association of America Association of Population Centers

Office of Government and Public Affairs

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January 23, 2018

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross,

On behalf of the over 3,000 scientists who are members of the Population Association of America (PAA) (www.populationassociation.org) and the over 40 federally supported population research centers at U.S. based research institutions comprising the Association of Population Centers (APC), we are writing to express our concerns regarding a request you recently received from the Department of Justice (DoJ) to add a citizenship question to the 2020 Census.

Population scientists include demographers, economists, and sociologists who conduct research on population trends and the individual, societal, and environmental implications of population change. They rely on the accurate and timely data from the federal statistical agencies to produce research findings and conduct research training activities. Decennial census data are the primary source of information population scientists rely on to monitor and analyze changes in the U.S. population. As a result, we share a profound commitment with other census stakeholders to ensuring full public participation in the decennial census. Our organizations recognize that based on your public comments, you are also committed to spearheading a full, fair, and accurate 2020 Census.

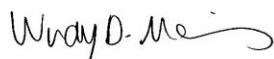
On January 10, you received a [letter](#) signed by almost 200 organizations, including ours, urging the Department of Commerce to reject a recent request from the Department of Justice for a new citizenship question on the 2020 Census. The letter outlined numerous adverse fiscal, operational, and legal consequences of adding such a question. As scientists, we are especially concerned about the negative effect an untested citizenship question would have on response rates and the validity of the decennial data. Based on the experience of other surveys, population scientists have observed that responses to citizenship questions tend to be of low quality. Further, we have seen firsthand how adding questions to any survey inherently increases costs as well.

As you know, and as noted in the January 10 letter, questionnaire design and testing began nearly eight years ago. With less than two years before Census 2020, there is simply not enough time to responsibly craft and

evaluate how a citizenship question would affect census participation. Further, we are concerned that adding a question, particularly one that could influence enhanced nonresponse follow up activity, will significantly increase the costs of the 2020 Census at a time when Congress is already considering a request from the Administration to spend an estimated additional \$3 billion on the 2020 Census.

We trust the Administration is weighing the harmful effects, including increased costs, suppressed response rates, and unreliable data, that the citizenship question could have this late in the decennial planning process—a process that is already facing tremendous challenges in its ramp up to Census 2020. Our organizations urge you to reject this request from the Department of Justice, and we thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,



Wendy Manning, Ph.D., President
Population Association of America



Steve Ruggles, Ph.D., President
Association of Population Centers

cc: Ron Jarmin, Acting Director, U.S. Census Bureau
Nancy Potok, Chief Statistician of the United States