

NAACP LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATIONAL FUND, INC.

The 2020 Census

WHAT IS THE CENSUS?

Every ten years since 1790, the federal government conducts the Census, which is a constitutionally required count of the entire population of the United States. For decades, the Census has consistently sought to count every person who lives in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories such as Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam. Most people are counted where they usually live and sleep on Census Day.

The Census is crucial to the protection of our political representation, community resources, services, and civil rights. The next Census will occur in the Spring of 2020.

During the Census, you will have the opportunity to empower and strengthen yourself and your community by providing very basic information about your household on the Census questionnaire. Filling out the Census form should take only minutes and can be done electronically, including by using a mobile device. Census field workers and other employees are not law enforcement or Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials, and the Census Bureau is required by law to keep all of the information that you provide completely confidential.

WHY THE CENSUS MATTERS: EQUALITY & COMMUNITY RESOURCES ARE AT STAKE

Your participation in the 2020 Census is vital to ensuring that you have an equal voice in government and fair access to federal and state funding for your community.

The 2020 Census count will affect:

- Federal & State Funding: Your community's share of more than \$880 billion annually in federal funds—and more in state funds—distributed nationwide;
- Public Services: The location of schools, roads, hospitals, childcare and senior citizen centers, planning for transportation projects, and other essential services;

- Political Representation: The number of U.S. House of Representatives seats allocated to your state, the number of votes for president that your state gets in the Electoral College, and the way voting districts are drawn for Congress, state legislatures, school boards, city councils, and other important local and municipal bodies; and
- Civil Rights: Enforcement of your civil rights under anti-discrimination and voting rights laws.

UNDERCOUNT OF PEOPLE OF COLOR

Black people and other people of color are at a higher risk of being undercounted and are disproportionately represented among the groups of people who are not captured by Census practices. Indeed, Black people have been substantially undercounted since an undercount in the Census was first officially documented in 1940. The Census Bureau estimates that the last Census, in 2010, failed to count 2.1% of Black people, 1.5% of Latinx people, and 4.9% of Native American people who live on reservations.

Additional groups that the Census has historically undercounted include renters and people who live in “irregular housing,” young children, people who do not speak English fluently, and those who move frequently such as military personnel, employees of the federal government who live abroad, and people staying in homeless shelters and group homes.

Similarly, members of low-income and immigrant communities often have a higher risk of being under-counted by the Census because they fear disclosing their personal information.

The risk of an undercount among Black people and other people of color may be particularly high in 2020 due to various and cumulative factors including: reports of the addition of a “citizenship status question”; continuing displacement resulting from gentrification and foreclosure crises; major hurricanes and other natural disasters; concerns about a potentially reduced commitment on the part of the current Executive Branch to the goal of counting the entire U.S. population; and high-profile hacking incidents and intensified law and immigration enforcement efforts that have inspired reluctance to engage with the government.

The consequences of being undercounted are significant and include loss of federal money that our communities need; insufficient and unresponsive political representation; reduced power in presidential elections; and lack of public awareness and documentation of our nation’s diversity.

CONFIDENTIALITY

By law, the Census Bureau is required to keep all information provided in the service of the Census confidential—it may not be shared with law enforcement, the IRS, welfare, FBI, ICE or other immigration officials, or anyone else. All Census employees swear an oath to protect respondent data for their entire lives, and face prison time if they break this oath. When Census results are released, only aggregated statistics—and never people’s names or personal information—can be published.

POTENTIAL CITIZENSHIP STATUS QUESTION

The Census Bureau has stated that it plans to include a question about respondents' citizenship status in the 2020 Census Questionnaire for the first time in several decades. Civil rights groups and others have brought several lawsuits against the Census Bureau challenging this decision; on January 15 and March 6, 2019, federal courts in two separate cases ordered the Trump administration to remove the citizenship question from the census questionnaire. But litigation is ongoing, and some questions remain about whether the Census in 2020 will include a question about citizenship.

Whether or not a citizenship status question is added to the 2020 Census, all information provided must remain confidential and no personal information can be shared legally with any law enforcement agency.

While LDF and other civil rights groups will continue to oppose the addition of a citizenship status question—and to encourage Congress to pass legislation blocking the inclusion of a citizenship question—we will also work to ensure that all people participate in the 2020 Census despite attempts by government officials to deter participation.