



**Testimony of Julie Menin  
New York City Census 2020  
Office of the Mayor**

**Before the Committee on Governmental Operations**

**Hearing on: Completing the 2020 Census Count**

**October 14, 2020**

**Introduction**

Good afternoon, Chair Cabrera, Census Task Force Co-Chairs Rivera and Menchaca, and all members of the committee. My name is Julie Menin and I am proud to serve as Director of NYC Census 2020 (“NYC Census”), as well as Executive Assistant Corporation Counsel at the New York City Law Department. I am joined today by several members of our team, including our Deputy Director Amit S. Bagga, our Field Director Kathleen Daniel, and our Complete Count Fund Program Director Alyson Grant Tarek.

As you know, the census is the basis on which we here in New York City are able to obtain the money, power, and respect that are rightfully ours. In addition to determining the distribution of \$1.5 trillion every year, it also determines New York State’s political representation in Congress, our city’s representation in Albany, as well as how local, state, and federal legislative district lines are drawn. This year, the public health and economic crises caused by COVID-19 have provided a stark reminder of the vital importance of an accurate count. The census is about all New Yorkers demanding respect and being represented in this foundational democratic exercise that determines our future, no matter where we’re from, what immigration status we might have, what language we speak, what religion we practice, or who we love.

We speak to you today in the unfortunate and maddening context of a census that has just under 48 hours until it ends, instead of one with two weeks left to go. Despite court after court rejecting the Trump Administration’s attempts to end the census early, the nation was delivered the shocking news from the Supreme Court last night that the Administration can, in fact, end the census early -- which is exactly what it has announced it will do. The U.S. Census Bureau will end self-response tomorrow, October 15 at 11:59 PM Hawaii Standard Time, which is 6 AM Eastern Standard Time on October 16. Now more than ever, every single minute counts and we will continue our work of closing the gap even further over the next 41 hours.

Despite this troubling decision, and despite facing every obstacle imaginable (or even beyond imagination), we at NYC Census have taken our responsibility to achieve a complete and accurate count of all New Yorkers very seriously. That is why today, we are incredibly proud to share that our first-of-its-kind effort has enabled New York City to reach a self-response rate of 61.4%, meaning we have essentially met our 2010 initial return rate and beat the U.S. Census Bureau's estimate of our pre-COVID self-response rate this year by 3.4 percentage points. In addition, we have aggressively narrowed the gap between New York City's self-response rate and the nation's, representing an enormous improvement in our performance both relative to 2010 as well as relative to other cities. Today, we are just 5.4 percentage points from the national average, whereas we were nearly 14 percentage points behind the nation in 2010. These results represent enormous success for our campaign, our hundreds of partners, and indeed, our entire city.

Achieving this rate was indeed an unlikely feat, given the unprecedented challenges this census has faced, from the widespread fear and confusion in immigrant communities around the citizenship question, to the understandable lack of trust deeply rooted in our city's Black communities, to the challenges posed by this being the first census to be conducted primarily online, and, of course, to the unthinkable challenges posed by the spread of COVID-19.

I would like to once again thank the Council and the Chairs for the opportunity to testify before you today, and also thank all of our partners from across the city, in particular the awardees of the Complete Count Fund, as well as our Citywide Partners, without whom our work would not have been possible.

### **By the Numbers: Self-Response in New York City**

#### *Citywide Performance*

From the beginning, our campaign's stated goal, which was set based on close collaboration with the Citywide Partners group, was to achieve a self-response rate that was as high as possible, as well as close the self-response rate gap between New York City and the nation. Focusing on self-response was critical, as it is by far the most complete, accurate, and easy way to respond, and closing the gap was equally important, as the census is a national competition for resources and representation. This means that the success of our performance isn't simply an absolute figure, but must indeed be measured relative to the performance of other places.

Not only have we essentially matched our 2010 self-response rate and aggressively closed the gap between ourselves and the nation by two-thirds, we have also out-performed a large number of major U.S. cities with similar demographic characteristics. This list includes Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Atlanta, Orlando, Miami, Detroit, Houston, Dallas, and, most notably, both Los Angeles and Chicago.

It is also important to note that our campaign has resulted in an ongoing, steady increase in self-

response over time, a result of innovative and creative outreach tactics that have enabled us to be nimbly responsive to changing realities on the ground. Since July 24, New York City's increase in self-response has outpaced that of the nation's, increasing by 7.5 percentage points, as compared to just a 4.3 percentage point increase in the nation overall.

In addition to these successes, we are very proud to note that we are the first and only jurisdiction in the nation to ensure a nearly-complete count of residents experiencing homelessness, and we believe we are among the very few to ensure a complete count of all residents living in public housing. As the committee knows, the overwhelming majority of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness reside in shelter and not on the streets, owing to the City being under court order to provide such shelter. Prior to our intervention, the Census Bureau had been planning on sending staff to each site where New Yorkers are housed to attempt to conduct a count of all those in shelter. Given the many particularities of the shelter landscape in New York City and given that the vast majority of New Yorkers residing in shelter were not likely to speak with a representative of the federal government, we knew that an alternate solution needed to be identified. As such, leveraging the strength of our relationship with the Department of Social Services (DSS), we were able to broker an unprecedented arrangement between DSS and the Census Bureau to have DSS provide a complete accounting of all those in shelter directly to the Bureau via a secure data transfer. We are the first and only city in the nation to have achieved this. Because all census responses are protected by Title XIII of the U.S. Code, none of this information can ever be released by the Bureau to anyone - including back to the City - and all New Yorkers who have been residing in shelter have been included in this year's count.

We also brokered a similar data transfer between NYCHA and the Census Bureau, though it should be noted that any response from a NYCHA household that self-responded to the census online, by phone, or by mail supersedes any information NYCHA will have provided to the Bureau. As a result of these arrangements, our campaign has been able to ensure a complete count of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers belonging to communities that have otherwise been historically very significantly undercounted.

### *Borough-by-Borough*

In terms of our five boroughs, Staten Island currently holds the highest self-response rate at 66.1%, ahead of its 2010 rate of 62.2%.<sup>1</sup> At 62.5%, Manhattan currently holds the second-highest self-response rate, which is unfortunately some percentage points behind its 2010 response rate of 68.6%. We believe this can be largely attributed to a large number of Manhattan residents leaving New York City the week COVID-19 started to become widespread in New York City, which

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of comparison, NYC Census 2020 is utilizing the "initial return rate" in 2010, which is the U.S. Census Bureau's estimate of the percentage of households that self-responded via mail *prior* to the Bureau's deletion of "vacant" and "non-existent" addresses.

happened to be the very same week that census mailers from the Census Bureau hit mailboxes in our city. I will discuss our response to this issue in more detail shortly.

Queens is currently in third place with a self-response rate of 62.3%, ahead of its 2010 initial return rate of 61.7%. Queens has had the highest percentage-point increase in self-response of all the boroughs since July 24 (our first Week of Action). Next, we have The Bronx at 62.2%, just four-tenths of a point shy of its 2010 number. Lastly, though Brooklyn comes in fifth at 58.6%, it is now three full percentage points ahead of its 2010 figure of 55.5%.

### *Historically Black Communities*

I am particularly pleased to report that the large majority of Black communities throughout New York City are exceeding their 2010 performance, both in absolute terms as well as relative to the national average. This has only been possible through an unprecedented City-and-community partnership that the numbers prove to be a model of successful organizing. For example, Co-op City in The Bronx currently has a self-response rate of nearly 76%, approximately nine percentage points *ahead* of the national average. In 2010, its initial return rate was approximately 68%, close to eight percentage points *behind* the national average. Cambria Heights in Southeast Queens is now at just under 68%, nearly a full point ahead of the nation this year, whereas in 2010 it had a response rate of 61%, more than 14 percentage points behind the nation. These neighborhoods are also ahead of the citywide average this year, and are joined by Central Harlem, Laurelton, and Springfield Gardens in bearing this distinction.

In addition, a large number of Black neighborhoods that are behind the citywide average have aggressively closed the gap between themselves and the nation this year compared to 2010, narrowing this distance by anywhere from five to 20 percentage points. Nowhere has the improvement been as notable, however, as parts of Central and Eastern Brooklyn. Today, Prospect-Lefferts Gardens and Crown Heights (West)<sup>2</sup> both have self-response rates of approximately 67%, meaning that they have entirely eliminated the gap between themselves and the nation this year, and in doing so, have demonstrated improvements of 24 and 21 percentage points, respectively, compared to their response rates in 2010.

### *Immigrant Communities*

As the Committee is aware, we collectively faced unprecedented challenges in terms of self-response in immigrant communities for a variety of reasons, from a basic lack of awareness of the census and its importance, to the immense fear created by the Trump Administration's relentless

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<sup>2</sup> The neighborhood of Crown Heights has been split into "Crown Heights (East)" and "Crown Heights (West)" for the purposes of creating and managing appropriately-sized "Neighborhood Organizing Census Committees (NOCCs).

attacks on both the census and immigrant communities generally over the last four years. In addition, both between immigrant groups and within immigrant groups, there are often significant differences in terms of levels of English proficiency, rates of educational attainment, rates of poverty, lengths of time communities have been established, as well as the strength of civic infrastructure, leading to varying rates of response to the census. Given our limited time today, I will not go into detail on these differences among our Latinx, East Asian, and South Asian communities but we are happy to discuss as needed.

#### *Latinx Communities*

- Washington Heights (70.9%) and Inwood (71.9%)
- University Heights (64.3%) and Castle Hill 59.5%
- Corona (57%), North Corona (47%), East Elmhurst (51.7%)
- Cypress Hills (48.9%)

#### *East Asian / East Asian Mixed Communities*

- Chinatown (63.4%)
- Sunset Park (55%) and Bensonhurst (56%)
- Flushing (61.5%) and Auburndale (70.3%)
- Oakland Gardens (76.5%) and Little Neck (72.6%)

#### *South Asian / South Asian Mixed Communities*

- Jackson Heights (67.2%) and Elmhurst (62.5%)
- Sunnyside (69.9%) and Woodside (66.4%)
- Richmond Hill (52.8%), Ozone Park (55.2%), and South Ozone Park (52.3%)
- Kensington (63.1%) and Midwood (59.7%)

### **Shift in Strategy Due to COVID-19**

New York City has historically faced significant challenges to census participation, many of which we have already discussed. In addition to these, a sizable number of low-income households in New York City lack access to broadband. It will come as no surprise that COVID-19 has exacerbated these and created new challenges to achieving a complete count.

Nonetheless, as soon as COVID-19 hit, we knew we had to pivot -- and we had established an infrastructure that allowed us to do so. We immediately expanded our investment in digital and direct messaging by doubling our investment in Hustle, our peer-to-peer texting

tool, and by procuring a predictive dialer to allow for larger and more efficient phone banking. These two actions allowed us to dramatically increase our ability to reach New Yorkers. To date, we have sent over 7.1 million text messages through Hustle and we have made over 3.1 million phone calls. Outreach efforts have been bolstered by assistance from agency partners and by the CUNY Census Corps, which we funded to hire more than 200 students who were trained on texting and phone-banking.

Additionally, through intrepid and immediate action, we were also able to aggressively renegotiate our existing MTA contract and recoup nearly \$1.3 million from our subway and bus ad buy. We deployed these funds into mobile and digital advertising, which we will discuss in further detail shortly.

We also quickly moved to building a new campaign to reach New York City's many immigrant communities via WhatsApp, KakaoTalk, and WeChat. In cooperation with Complete Count Fund awardees and Citywide Partners, we launched groups in 15 different languages on these messaging apps, which are often the primary method by which these immigrant communities consume and share important information.

### **Challenging Circumstances: Creative Solutions**

We didn't stop there. As the situation on the ground shifted rapidly, so did our tactics. Once COVID-19 rates began to come under control, we were able to quickly begin safe in-person outreach wherever it was possible. Though meetings and gatherings couldn't be convened, we knew that we had to reach New Yorkers wherever they were, no matter the circumstances. Sadly, this largely proved to be free food distribution sites across the city, which saw very long lines of New Yorkers now facing crippling food insecurity as a result of the COVID-induced economic crisis. Especially given that the large majority of these New Yorkers also represented historically undercounted communities, we knew we had to reach them. So, in late May, our staff began census completion efforts at food and PPE distribution sites. To date, we have participated in close to 150 such events, which have collectively yielded several thousands of completes. It is worth noting that a large number of these events have taken place in Corona, where our staff and volunteers have reported average household sizes of six to 12 individuals -- several times the average size of a New York City household based on Census Bureau estimates -- underscoring just how critical these events have been in counting among the hardest to reach New Yorkers living in the most overcrowded conditions.

In addition to these efforts, we have also distributed over 271,000 multilingual brochures to 490 DOE food distribution sites and over 1,500 posters to essential businesses in 58 target ZIP codes, including Canarsie, Harlem, North Corona, East Elmhurst, Ozone Park, Sunset Park, Borough Park, and many more.

We saw a significant increase in self-response rates during our various days of targeted action, which included major street canvassing, and large-scale phone mobilizations, and major events with partners and electeds, including car caravans to promote the census. Overall, we have planned and participated in over 1,000 events since the beginning of this campaign. Our most successful in-person operation to date has unquestionably been the deployment of trained paid canvassing teams, which have directly helped nearly 20,000 New York City households complete the census. This figure likely represents approximately 50,000 New Yorkers being counted.<sup>3</sup>

With the support of key strategic partners, we ran multiple contests to further mobilize New Yorkers to complete the census. From our Census Subway Series, to NYC Counts Contest, to the Battle of the Boroughs, we introduced competition to incentivize self-response and garnered 3,125 census completes. Prizes included \$1,000 Seamless gift cards, \$50 Lyft credits, one year CitiBike membership, and a one year MoMA membership.

Additionally, we saw great success with our pilot robocalls with Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. For only approximately \$1,000 we were able to reach almost 40,000 residents in the NY-14 district, hundreds of which opted to be directly patched through to the United States Census Bureau's phone line to complete the census. Thanks to a generous support from the Robin Hood Foundation, we expanded this strategy to reach approximately 2.6 million landlines in New York City. So far, robocalls recorded by nine elected officials have helped us patch through 7,351 households directly to the US Census Bureau with more recordings to come.

In addition to pivoting our own efforts, we also allowed Complete Count Fund awardees, many of whom had built their programs based on in-person outreach, to repurpose some of their budgets to invest in marketing from their organizations through advertisements, including TV and radio, direct mail, and boosted social media posts. These proved to be effective methods by which to reach their members, clients, and communities at large in the unique and trusted voice of organizations.

While these COVID-induced adjustments have shown clear results and made it possible for our campaign to reach millions of New Yorkers despite NY PAUSE regulations, it is impossible to overstate the impact of COVID on the work of our agency and our partners. Particularly when it comes to overcoming resistance or fears that so many New Yorkers feel towards the federal government, there is simply no substitute for in-person face to face conversations. While we were pleased that the Census Bureau initially adjusted its timeline to extend the period of self-response and delay the start of Non-Response Follow-up, the ongoing legal battle over the end of the 2020 Census has made the final weeks of this campaign tumultuous and unpredictable. Once again, with the latest COVID-19 developments, we've pulled all in-person outreach from the affected areas.

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<sup>3</sup> This calculation is based on the U.S. Census Bureau's 2014-2018 estimate that the average household size in New York City is 2.62 persons: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/newyorkcitynewyork>

Nonetheless, we have been approaching every day as if it's the last day to complete the census and continuing our efforts to get every New Yorker counted.

### **Communicating about the Census: Language Access, Cultural Relevance, and Creativity**

In a city where hundreds of languages are spoken, language access is at the core of our work. From multilingual text- and phone-banks, conducted in Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Kreyol, Arabic, Yiddish, Bangla, Punjabi, and Urdu, to the more 80 languages in which our awardees serve New Yorkers, reaching New Yorkers in the languages that they speak has been our number one priority.

Over the course of our campaign, we have successfully developed and executed 34 different campaigns in 27 languages -- absolutely unprecedented for any City initiative in history. In addition, because we know that simply translating content isn't sufficient to truly ensure linguistic and cultural competency, we put all of our translations through a rigorous native-speaker, community review process to ensure that all of our foreign-language content was accessible and relevant.

We have run digital ads in 27 languages across multiple media platforms, including all of the major social media platforms and Google. In addition, we ran display advertisements on more than 150 websites, as well as ads on Hulu, YouTube, and Pandora. This is of course in addition to running advertisements in 13 languages across network, cable, and foreign-language television and radio, as well as print ads in 19 non-English languages in more than 150 community and foreign-language media outlets.

In terms of messaging, our initial campaigns focused on key messages that reinforced the safety and security of the census for everyone and its ability to determine billions of dollars of funding for our communities. Post-COVID, we ran campaigns that specifically linked the census to health care and essential services, in addition to PSAs with figures like Cardi B and Alicia Keys that educated viewers on the census' role in determining political representation. We launched two community-specific campaigns: 'On the Front Lines' features Black New Yorkers who provided essential services (from medical care to deliveries) during COVID explaining why every community member should complete the census for the benefit of their community; and a campaign we called 'Doubled Up' that specifically speaks to largely immigrant New Yorkers in living in illegal units, as well as an ad specific to NYCHA residents about how participating in the census and truthfully sharing the number of people living in a unit are completely safe, confidential, and protected. This was the city's first-ever campaign speaking to those living in such situations. In addition, unlike any other advertising campaign in the city's history, we also launched culturally-specific campaigns tying the census to Eid, Pride, Lunar New Year, and the Black Lives Matter movement, among others. A full portfolio of all of our campaigns has been provided to you.

We know our campaigns have worked. The average “click-through rate” (CTR) for our campaigns has been over one percent, whereas the standard for City campaigns is between two-tenths and three-tenths of a percentage point. The CTR for our non-English campaigns, and in particular our Doubled Up campaign, was at times much higher -- between three and five percentage points -- demonstrating our ability to truly reach New Yorkers in new and effective ways.

One of the unexpected effects of COVID-19 on the ability to conduct the census was the exodus of many New Yorkers, primarily of higher means and largely Manhattanites, just as the first mailers from the United States Census Bureau arrived. In order to better reach these New Yorkers, we launched a targeted digital advertising campaign pegged to cell numbers irrespective of physical location and received approximately 10,000 clicks. Working with our partners through the Board of Elections, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, and the League of Women Voters, 30,000 New Yorkers who have temporarily left NYC received a postcard, over 30,000 received a phone call, and over 25,000 received an email. Additionally, we worked with numerous cultural institutions, civic groups, and institutional non-profits who were uniquely positioned to reach these New Yorkers.

Our campaign has also leveraged City agencies’ direct mailing operations to provide their clients with information about the census. To date, we have sent over 2.4 million pieces of mail to New Yorkers encouraging them to complete the census. This includes 857,000 DSS mailings in clients’ benefit updates; 715,000 DOF mailings in quarterly statements of account updates; 830,000 DEP mailings in quarterly water bills; and 170,000 NYCHA mailings in the March rent roll. Additionally, agencies have sent out over 425,000 census specific emails to clients, the majority of which includes emails to DSS clients. We worked with the Public Libraries to expand our capacity to do targeted mailings, sending over 276,872 multi-lingual postcards to neighborhoods with the lowest response rates across Brooklyn, The Bronx, and Queens.

### **Importance of Ongoing Work with Partners**

The success of the census effort to date has been made possible through the hard work and resiliency of our Citywide Partners, fellow City Agencies, all three library systems, elected officials, and the Complete Count Fund Awardees. They have adapted to the COVID environment and have creatively designed alternate outreach strategies to reach their individual communities.

The Complete Count Fund awardees were chosen because they are trusted messengers and have proven that they know their communities best. Despite the obstacles of adjusting their operations, as well as modifying their planned census work, they have still been able to connect with hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers and ensure they complete the census. Specifically, awardees were asked to shift towards outreach tactics that do not involve in-person contact with the general public,

as well as modify their “in-reach” tactics that allow for communication with adjusted forms of service delivery.

One notable example of this innovation comes to us from the Borough Park Jewish Community Council, who were able to insert and promote census outreach activities within their existing food pantry operations. They held two ‘Census Drive-Thrus’ where households were able to drive to a location to receive foodstuffs and simultaneously fill out the census. The BPJCC was able to assist over 500 households in completing the census. These events had an immediate impact on the self-response rate in Borough Park and the surrounding areas. In the day following the first ‘drive-thru,’ Borough Park and the adjacent neighborhoods of Fort Hamilton and Mapleton nearly quadrupled their internet response rate in comparison to their previous 10 days’ average.

Other partners have modified their budgets and digital outreach strategy to be impactful while they continue their work in new and different ways. For example, SOMOS has been airing census videos on their internal tv system and repurposed a portion of their “in-person outreach” budget towards advertisements on radio and television, including Univision and other major outlets.

While many awardees have been able to shift and pivot their resources and become even more creative, these creative solutions remain less effective than in-person interactions in a non-COVID-19 environment would have been. Nonetheless, we worked collaboratively and learned from these organizations as they found new ways to get out the count in these times, including many of the virtual tools we utilized in addition to their own virtual events and in-person outreach.

### **Conclusion: Looking to future**

A successful census is vital for the future of New York City. The Census affects every one of us - it affects the resources that buy the books and school supplies at public schools, funds the programs that pay for our health care, and profoundly affects our political representation. For Black, brown and immigrant communities, which have long been undercounted throughout the history of the census, the 2020 Census is an opportunity to secure their rightful share of billions in federal funding and representation at every level of government.

At this final moment, I am immensely proud of the work we have done, especially amidst all of the obstacles. We will continue to give it all we’ve got over the next 41 hours to bring New York City’s response closer still to the national response rate. What we’ve accomplished this year is nothing short of a herculean effort and is a prime example of the strength of government and community in partnership. We again thank the Council, and all our partners, for working alongside us in this effort.



## **Asian American Federation**

### **Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations Oversight - The 2020 Census in New York City**

*October 14, 2020*

I want to thank the Committee for giving me the opportunity to testify today. I'm Howard Shih, the Research and Policy Director at the Asian American Federation. As a citywide partner of the NYC Census Office, a steering committee member of the New York Counts 2020 Coalition, a member of the APA Complete Count Committee in New York City, and a Census Information Center, the Asian American Federation has been at the forefront of Census related issues for the Asian community. The decennial census is the primary source of information on Asian communities and is vital for representation and advocacy for our communities.

Aside from the sheer scale and long-term impact of this once-in-a-decade exercise, 2020 has presented a host of challenges that have fundamentally impacted the way the Census has been conducted. Amidst a pandemic and unprecedented political and social upheaval, complete with efforts to undermine the legitimacy of this foundational exercise of democracy, the Asian American Federation and its member and partner organizations have matched this context with an unprecedented organizing effort.

But it's important first to contextualize these efforts, because the context offers insights into the challenges of getting an accurate count in our community. Overall in 2019, 14.1% of Asians in New York City live in poverty, compared to a citywide poverty rate of 16.0%. Among seniors, 23.1% Asian New Yorkers lived in poverty compared to 18.4% of all seniors in the city. Additionally, language barriers remain high among Asian New Yorkers. Overall, 44.2% of Asians have limited English proficiency in New York City, compared to a citywide rate of 22.2%. Our Census efforts had to be culturally-competent and accessible, especially to those who have been chronically left out or forgotten by government initiatives, services and systems.

Finally, here's an indication of the scale our efforts had to reach; since 2000, the Asian population in New York City increased by 51%, growing from just under 873,000 in 2000 to over 1.3 million in 2019. It should also be noted that, overwhelmingly, Asian New Yorkers are immigrants, with 2 out of 3 in the city being foreign-born. Of those Asian immigrants, 27.3% arrived in 2010 or after.

The challenges have been numerous and offer up lessons that can broadly apply to:

1. The unprecedented investment in Census outreach by the city enabled a great deal of planning and infrastructure to be put in place before the start of the 2020 Census in March. Unfortunately, the COVID pandemic resulted in much of the work that was planned to be delayed, but we appreciate the City Census Office’s ability to pivot and devote more resources to text and phone banking, enabling the community partners to use this infrastructure to make use of this lost time.
2. Nevertheless, we knew that virtual outreach was never going to take the place of in-person outreach, especially in New York City’s Asian immigrant communities. Once the city began to open up from the strictest COVID shutdowns and community partners could once again do in-person census events, only then did Asian self-response rates improve and ultimately surpass city’s overall self-response rates. Trusted voices sharing the census message in the various languages spoken throughout the city is the most effective way to engage people who are unaware of the census or are wary of the census. In Table 1, we compare the self-response rates for various Asian groups to the citywide rate. Most of the initial mailings from the Census Bureau and the first wave of virtual outreach were completed by May 6th. Most of the Asian community saw faster increases in response rates in the July through September time frame when more in-person, socially distance outreach became possible. September 29 represents when many of the community partners wrapped up their most active outreach efforts largely due to funding deadlines.

Table 1: Change in Self-Response Rates

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Self-Response Rate on 9/29/2020</b>	<b>Self-Response Rate on 5/6/2020</b>	<b>Change in Response Rate</b>
Korean	66.5%	50.7%	15.8%
Pakistani	63.7%	48.9%	14.8%
<i>Asian</i>	<i>61.8%</i>	<i>44.7%</i>	<i>17.1%</i>
Chinese	61.0%	45.5%	15.5%
<i>NYC Average</i>	<i>60.8%</i>	<i>46.1%</i>	<i>14.7%</i>
Filipino	60.4%	43.4%	17.0%

Bangladeshi	60.4%	39.2%	21.2%
Indian	56.7%	38.8%	17.9%

Source: Analysis by Asian American Federation of Census Bureau Self-Response Rate data

3. Challenge of rebuilding census outreach infrastructure once every decade points to the need for the city to maintain a civic engagement infrastructure throughout the decade. There are many opportunities to use this infrastructure throughout the decade, including voter registration and information, citizenship and immigration, and disaster and pandemic relief. This infrastructure can be used anytime the City needs to spread a message widely throughout the city.



## **Make the Road New York Census Testimony October 14th, 2020**

Good Afternoon. My name is Antonio Alarcon, and I am the Census Coordinator at Make the Road New York. I am here to share the work my team has done over the last few months, in spite of repeated attacks by this administration and an ongoing pandemic, to make sure that our communities are counted in the 2020 Census.

Make the Road New York is the largest grassroots organization of immigrants and working-class people of color in New York, working to build the power of our communities to achieve dignity and justice through organizing, policy innovation, and survival services. With a membership of over 23,000 low-income individuals, we tackle the critical issues facing our community, including workers' rights, tenants' rights, language access, TGNCIQ+ justice, health care access, youth development, and immigrant civil rights.

We conduct outreach continuously in our communities—for issue campaigns, to ensure access to direct services, to register voters, and more—because we want to make sure our community's voices are counted and heard. Due to the 2010 Census' low turn-out in many communities of color and immigrant communities, critical funding for our communities was lost over the last decade. Low participation rates and undercounts were a particularly big problem in communities we represent, and we are seeing the ramifications of this loss of resources now as the pandemic burdens our communities disproportionately. In 2020 we've been trying to change that.

For the past few months Make the Road New York has implemented different strategies to reach out to community members and ensure they are counted. We started our efforts by educating our base by providing workshops across our offices. During these workshops, we saw



that there was widespread fear from community members on sharing personal information because of this administration's attempt to add a "citizenship" question to the Census.

In February, we started our canvassing program in which we educated hundreds of community members at train stations, restaurants, barbershops, and schools. In March, however, COVID-19 arrived, and our team quickly transitioned the work into phone banking, text messaging, and more. Since the beginning of the pandemic, our team has contacted over 150,000 community members and gotten over 10,000 confirmed census completions.

This administration has tried repeatedly to silence us and to spread fear in our community, but we will continue to fight back to ensure that our communities are fully counted and that we receive the resources we deserve. Among other ways that we are fighting these attacks, we joined our allies to file a federal lawsuit on July 24th in response to Trump's memorandum which seeks to remove undocumented immigrants from each state's Census count. Recently courts in NY and California agreed with our petitions, both agreed that the Census must continue until October 31st as previously stated and everyone regardless of status should be counted, a huge victory not only for our community but a big win for the state of NY. In our outreach, we will continue to send a clear message that our communities need to get counted in order to receive the funding and representation we deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

### **Spanish Summary**

Buenas tardes. Mi nombre es Antonio Alarcon, y soy el Coordinador del Censo en Make the Road New York. Estoy aquí para compartir el trabajo que mi equipo ha realizado en los últimos meses, a pesar de los repetidos ataques de esta administración y una pandemia en curso, para



asegurarme de que nuestras comunidades se cuenten en el Censo 2020.

En los últimos meses, Make the Road New York ha implementado diferentes estrategias para llegar a los miembros de la comunidad y garantizar que se cuenten. Comenzamos nuestros esfuerzos educando a nuestra base ofreciendo talleres en nuestras oficinas. Durante estos talleres, vimos que los miembros de la comunidad tenían un miedo generalizado a compartir información personal debido al intento de esta administración de agregar una pregunta de "ciudadanía" al Censo.

Desde el comienzo de la pandemia, nuestro equipo ha contactado a más de 150,000 miembros de la comunidad y ha obtenido más de 10,000 completaciones del censo confirmadas.

Esta administración ha tratado repetidamente de callarnos y de promulgar el miedo en nuestra comunidad, pero continuaremos luchando para asegurarnos de que nuestras comunidades estén totalmente contadas y que recibamos los recursos que merecemos. **AQUI ESTAMOS Y NO NOS VAMOS, y seremos CENSADOS!**



**Testimony of  
Katie Leonberger  
Community Resource Exchange**

**New York City Council  
Committee on Governmental Operations  
and 2020 Census Task Force**

**Wednesday, October 14, 2020  
Virtual Hearing**

Contact: Jason Peralta, [communications@crenyc.org](mailto:communications@crenyc.org)

Good afternoon, my name is Carlene Buccino and I'm testifying on behalf of Katie Leonberger, President and Chief Executive Officer at Community Resource Exchange (or CRE).

On behalf of CRE, we thank the New York City Council Governmental Operations Committee and 2020 Census Task Force for holding this important hearing on the 2020 Census in New York City.

CRE is a nonprofit that provides consulting services to social sector organizations. We serve more than 500 organizations annually, both here in New York City and across the country. Last year, we worked with, strengthened, and advised hundreds of groups leading the charge on today's critical issues - from immigrant rights, racial equity, health, education, housing, hunger, and policy advocacy. These groups provide vital community-based services that are lifelines to New Yorkers.

Last year, CRE was extremely grateful for the Council's support as we partnered to train and support nonprofits and community-based organizations (CBOs) to pursue census outreach and education. **Thanks to your funding, CRE supported 250 organizations that have, in turn, reached tens of thousands of New Yorkers with their census outreach.** Our sessions enabled people to conduct teach-ins within their neighborhoods, equipped frontline healthcare workers to answer census-related questions, and have trained and helped Complete Count Fund awardees conduct Census education in our new virtual world.

Throughout the pandemic, CRE has supported the nonprofit sector by convening with organization leaders, providing customized consulting support, and offering crisis-focused public webinars for organizations facing difficult decisions.

Nonprofit organizations have continued their unwavering dedication to ensuring that New York City gets a fair and accurate count. Yesterday, we learned that the Census will officially end at 6 AM EST this Friday morning based on a Supreme Court ruling. We can't wait another minute - all of us involved, who care about this City, need to do everything we can to ensure that as many New Yorkers as possible are counted in the next day and a half, from organizations doing critical outreach work and local government agencies supporting this effort, to NYC residents who can help get the word out in their neighborhoods and communities, as well as go online and complete their own census information.

To this end, we urge council members and the City to continue to support nonprofits and community-based organizations in this work, and to push back on an administration with a systemically racist and xenophobic agenda of shortening census data collection.

As we all know, achieving an accurate count will ensure that ALL New Yorkers will be better off, and our City will be a healthier place in which to work, live, and thrive.

In this final sprint of the Census, it will be important for the Council to continue to support outreach, education, and capacity building. I also want to note that while the Supreme Court's recent decision hurts an accurate count in the 2020 Census, it cannot count us out.

This decennial Census has encouraged unprecedented collaboration and partnerships in New York City between local government and the nonprofit sector, which has increased Census participation all over NYC. Through this effort, due to the tireless commitment of nonprofits, community-based organizations, the Mayor's Office of the Census and City Council, an incredible civic infrastructure has been created - one that can have long-lasting effects on the ways in which New York City can mobilize to engage communities for upcoming elections, future censuses, and many other critical topics impacting all of our lives.

CRE remains committed to continuing our partnership with the City and its nonprofit partners to reach as many New Yorkers as possible and secure its fair share of resources and representation.

We thank you for listening.

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY**  
**New York City Council Committee**  
**Hearing of the Governmental Operations Committee**  
**The 2020 Census in New York City**

**To:** Committee Chairman Cabrera, Councilmember Rivera and Councilmember Menchaca

**From:** Elizabeth Angeles, Senior Director, United Way of New York City

**Date:** October 14, 2020

My name is Elizabeth Angeles. I am the Senior Director of AdvocateNYC at the United Way of New York City. We thank the New York City Council for the investment to ensure a complete and accurate count in the 2020 Census, emphasizing the communities that have been historically undercounted across our city.

We believe that investing in the organizations that have the trust of those who have been historically undercounted has been the right focus and we are thankful for the Council's investment and partnership.

**United Way of New York City**

For 80 years, United Way of New York City has partnered across community, business, and government to address immediate and long-term needs to support low income New Yorkers throughout the five boroughs. We know the Census is a critical factor in determining the resources that support programs low income New Yorkers access, and as part of our mission, we have been committed to ensuring that every New Yorker is counted in the 2020 Census.

**UWNYC Census Efforts**

Since the inception of the Complete Count Fund (CCF), UWNYC has played the critical role as a network convener, helped guide the development of the NYC Census 2020 Campaign Plan, the development of the Complete Count Fund goals, and facilitated collaboration among community-based partners.

As part of our role as a Complete Count Fund awardee, we had a team of five staff members as Grant Managers. We provided support for 66 of the 157 awarded organizations, as they transitioned their outreach, education, and engagement plans to become virtual, given the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. UWNYC reviewed weekly reports, helping them adjust their outreach strategies to maximize the reach and impact, help create new partnerships, ensured timely and prompt communication with the NYC Census office among other responsibilities.

Despite being forced to quickly move to a virtual space, we continued to conduct bi-weekly virtual site visits with awardees, provide technical support as they navigated the tech tools provided by the NYC Census 2020 team, and have participated in numerous engagement activities with our awardees. In total, UWNYP managed awardees account for over 94K completes, over 847K conversations and engagements and over 42K census working hours. More broadly, we have reached over 275,000 New Yorkers through our outreach.

As part of our role as both Citywide Partner and CCF awardee, in partnership with Hester Street and The Robin Hood Foundation, we held five borough-wide convenings for CCF awardees, Robin Hood grantees, and others involved in local Complete Count Committees. We also worked with Hester Street, and the City on 12 grassroots planning sessions for Neighborhood Organizing Census Committees. These convenings helped highlight the desire among those organizations for collaboration and resources to support sharing best practices and recommendations to reach communities that have been most impacted by COVID-19, as well as communities that have lower neighborhood level self-response rates.

In September, we launched a microgrants initiative with Robin Hood and Hester Street called the Census Last Mile grant. We have been hosting weekly calls with updates on the self-response rate, upcoming census events, and strategies for all of Robin Hood's census grantees (68) and supporting the micro-grantees on an individual basis (8). The micro-grantees are located in historically undercounted neighborhoods (Bronx, Williamsbridge; Brooklyn, ENY; Brooklyn, Ocean Hill; Queens, Elmhurst; Queens, North Corona).

UWNYP has also leveraged our role as a leader among emergency food providers to lead the development of an Emergency Food & Benefits Access Provider Census Toolkit. The toolkit provides users with resources, best practices, and strategies to incorporate Census outreach into their current work.

## **Conclusion**

We have all worked together to reduce the gap between the national self-response rate and our City's. In 2010, NYC's initial self-response rate was about 14% lower than the national self-response rate (61.9% vs. 75.8%). Although our City's self-response rate currently remains lower than the national rate, we are closing that gap. As of October 12, 2020, NYC's self-response rate is now 5.4% lower than the national self-response rate (61.4% vs. 66.8%). We come to the City Council to share this experience highlight a few key asks.

First, one of our goals as part of this effort was to build greater civic engagement through Census 2020 outreach. We ask the NYC Council allocate resources to continue the work of supporting community-based organizations in building civic engagement particularly in communities that have been historically disconnected across our city.

Second, we ask that the council capture all that we have learned to draw from this for the next Census. NYC Council has the power and resources to invest in research and analysis to effectively document what has worked, and what we have learned.

Finally, we ask that the Council invest in Census outreach every decade, including starting to plan for the Census much earlier than we did this year, to ensure a complete and accurate count for New York in the future.

Thank you for your attention.



**New York City Council**  
**Committee on Governmental Operations, Chair Cabrera**  
**June 22, 2020**  
**Oversight - Complete 2020 Census Count More Critical than Ever**

Thank you to Chair Cabrera and the Committee on Governmental Operations for holding this important hearing on the 2020 census during these challenging times.

With a base of more than 100 community-based organizations, LiveOn NY's members provide core services that allow older adults to thrive in our communities, including senior centers, home-delivered meals, affordable housing, elder abuse prevention services, caregiver supports, NORCs, case management and more. Our members, and DFTA's network, provides key services to over 50,000 older adults and caregivers daily.

On a daily basis, our members see the crucial importance of aging services and equitable resource allocation. The COVID-19 pandemic has further brought this reality to the surface as providers scramble to serve increasing needs for nutrition supports, mental health services, and virtual programming on budgets consistently below the true cost of service provision. Further, during COVID-19 our members have seen the demand for other institutions impacted by federal funding, namely hospitals and health services particularly those found in the outer boroughs which have been hardest hit by the virus. As these realities further highlight the need for equitable funding across our city, the opportunity to create change by completing the 2020 census is only heightened.

The census is mandated by the U.S. Constitution and has been conducted every 10 years since 1790. The two most important factors that the census impacts is representation in the U.S. House of Congress and how \$675 billion in federal funding is distributed in resource allocation. **Notably, the 2020 Census is the first decennial census that can be completed either online, by phone or by mail.** Due to the emphasis for respondents to complete the census online, for the first time in history, older adults are considered a hard-to-count (HTC) population. The census term Hard-to-count (HTC) is defined as groups or populations who have historically been undercounted and therefore are less likely to respond to the Census, historically this has included immigrants, people of color, renters, and low income households, among others. In New York City, this makes large swaths of our City "hard to count" and a complete count incredibly difficult. In response to this, LiveOn NY is working diligently to encourage all older adults to get counted, which will ensure fair funding for key services and programs that improve the lives of older New Yorkers.

As part of this effort and through LiveOn NY's collaborative education and training efforts, we have partnered with the New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM) to disseminate their *Get Out The Count: Strategies For Optimizing 2020 Census Participation Among Older People* toolkit, which was made possible by the generous support of The Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation. Though we initially planned to hold trainings on this toolkit in person, like many, COVID-19 has meant shifting our efforts to webinar based outreach. These webinars are for professionals who regularly interact with older New Yorkers on a formal and informal basis. As trusted messengers in their communities, professionals learn how they can positively impact census participation by educating older adults on the importance of the census; dispelling any fears they may have about participating; sharing of best-practices to strategically plan census outreach using tools such as the IMAGE:NYC Interactive Map of Aging and 2020 Hard to Count Map; and informing of other creative outreach strategies others on the webinar are implementing. We hope that through this work, professionals are better able to educate and engage the older adults they serve to not only participate in the Census, but to encourage their networks to participate as well.

As of today, LiveOn NY has led 6 webinars, reaching more than 170 professionals, as well as partnering with numerous other organizations such as the Women in Faith Fellowship and the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York. During this work, we have observed some key trends that we hoped to share:

- **Despite the many challenges that exist for non-profits today, Census outreach remains a clear priority**, particularly with respect to increasing census participation among older adults. This demonstrates the significant education and outreach that was done to elevate awareness of the importance of this work.
- **It remains incredibly important to remind individuals that the census is safe, secure and confidential.** Further, it continues to be necessary to dispel fears and myths about the census, especially in immigrant communities, where there may be hesitation and uncertainty around completing the census because of the citizenship question, which we emphasize is not included in the census. As different communities respond to definitions of confidentiality, security, and trust differently, it is important to have open and honest conversations about these key concerns.
- **The pandemic has led many to think creatively on how to execute census outreach.** Some have come up with ideas such as: partnering with building management to share information with tenants on census; sharing census information in immigration classes; distributing census information in meal packages/home delivered meals; creating a buddy system, where older adults are committed to have their buddy (friend, family, neighbor) complete the census; and more. In spite of the incredible creativity we have already seen, professionals continue to express the need for additional support or guidance in planning *creatively* for census outreach given the outreach limitations imposed by COVID-19.



Making New York a better place to age

- **As trusted messengers working or living in these communities, it is important to be all ears and be able to explain the tangible, relevant benefits of census participation.** Focusing on the positive outcomes of completing the census is a key way to motivate your audience, however, it still requires patience and active listening to successfully impact census participation in hard-to-count communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and share our outreach experiences to date, we hope to remain a partner to the City in working to ensure a complete count in the 2020 Census.

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*LiveOn NY's members provide the core, community-based services that allow older adults to thrive in their communities. With a base of more than 100 community-based organizations serving at least 300,000 older New Yorkers annually. Our members provide services ranging from senior centers, congregate and home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing with services, elder abuse prevention services, caregiver supports, case management, transportation, and NORCs. LiveOn NY advocates for increased funding for these vital services to improve both the solvency of the system and the overall capacity of community-based service providers.*

*LiveOn NY also administers a citywide outreach program and staffs a hotline that educates, screens and helps with benefit enrollment including SNAP, SCRIE and others, and also administers the Rights and Information for Senior Empowerment (RISE) program to bring critical information directly to seniors on important topics to help them age well in their communities.*



## **Testimony of New York Counts 2020**

Committee on Governmental Operations

Accuracy of Census Operations Critical for our Most Vulnerable Communities

October 14, 2020

Thank you, Chair Cabrera, Chair Menchaca, Chair Rivera and members of the Committee on Governmental Operations and the 2020 Census Task Force. I am Meeta Anand, Census 2020 Senior Fellow at the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC). NYIC also serves as the convener for New York Counts 2020, where I have been acting as the facilitator. For well over two years, New York Counts 2020 has been working through its partners to achieve a fair and accurate Census. I want to thank the Council for their partnership throughout this long rollercoaster of a process.

Others have recounted and will recount where we stand as a city in comparison to the rest of the State and country and emphasized how there are specific areas in the city that still have low response rates. Indeed, as a general rule, throughout the state, what we have seen is that even in counties that have high self-response rates, urban areas remain undercounted, and then within the urban areas, there are pockets that show even lower response rates, and that often correlates with our most vulnerable communities.

I think we should be very clear, though, about what we are talking about when talking about response rates. The Census Bureau has articulated a goal of having 99% of households enumerated. Leaving aside the obvious issues of leaving even .1% uncounted, there are issues in using 99% a standard which are exacerbated by the rush to get to 99%. NRFU (non-response follow-up) is twice as likely to miss people in a household that otherwise is counted than is true for households that self-respond. Enumerators must verify a vacant housing unit was vacant on April 1, which might require more time and investigation. Rushing this process could lead to an incorrect assumption on occupancy. A rushed census could lead to more “administrative record enumerations” (using administrative records or data collected in other Bureau surveys). These records can leave out groups such as young children and young adult men of color. Enumerators will continue to visit housing units up to three times before turning to “proxies,” such as a neighbor or landlord, to collect at least basic information about the household. This type of

enumeration has also proven unreliable. In 2010, enumerators had to visit households six times before turning to a proxy. In short, even while some tout the strong “total enumerated” numbers in NY, these numbers need to be taken with a grain of salt, as it doesn’t represent the numbers on a neighborhood by neighborhood basis (which is not provided), not does it give any indication of the quality of the data -- which is even more concerning when the Commerce Department is insistent on conducting necessary data processing in a highly compressed timeline.

### **Our Work**

To be fair, what we have achieved in this unprecedented time is to be commended. We have done so while adhering to social-distancing guidelines, while living in the epicenter of the epicenter during the onset of the pandemic, and with the backdrop of a completely extraordinary news-cycle. NY Counts 2020 has continued to provide information and resources to partners throughout NYC and NYS including:

- Participating and promoting textbanking in NY through a coalition consisting of NY Counts 2020, NYIC, NALEO and NYCET that targeted historically undercounted communities.
- Hosting of a four-day virtual conference in July on the importance of the Census in rebuilding NY post-pandemic.
- Development and distribution of one pagers on what individuals can do to get out the Census
- Development and distribution of the Share the Love Census Zoom party, that turns anyone into a Census organizer
- Co-organizer of the press conferences and march that took place on 9/23 in Manhattan and Brooklyn
- Co-sponsor of ABNY’s Flash Mob in Times Square
- Creation of mult-lingual social media campaigns for distribution.

### **What remains**

It is essential that we continue this work in the limited time remaining and we must and will be successful. For every minute that the Census continues, we must continue to encourage our fellow New Yorkers to not only complete the Census but to encourage everyone they know to do so. We must take advantage of every opportunity we have and every resource available. And we must remain ever vigilant in ensuring that the Census numbers provided are accurate, by promoting the importance of self-response, advocating for the extension of Census operations, and, particularly, statutory reporting deadlines.

The City made an unprecedented investment in Census 2020, and we urge that we fight until the last minute that this investment is not rendered meaningless by undermining accuracy in the rush to completion.



## **Testimony of the New York Immigration Coalition**

Committee on Governmental Operations  
Complete 2020 Census Count More Critical Than Ever  
October 14, 2020

Thank you, Chair Cabrera, Chair Menchaca, Chair Rivera and members of the Committee on Governmental Operations and the 2020 Census Task Force. I am Wennie Chin, Senior Manager of Civic Engagement at the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC). NYIC also serves as the convener for New York Counts 2020. For well over two years, NYIC and our partners have been working on Census 2020. There have been many hurdles, both anticipated and not. I want to thank the Council for their partnership through this long process.

Where we currently stand as a city is a response rate that lags both the State and the country. As of October 13th, our self-response rates were 61.4% as a whole (with Staten Island at 66.1%, Manhattan at 62.5%, the Bronx at 62.2%, Queens at 62.3%, and Brooklyn at 58.6%). This compares to a New York State self-response rate of 63.9% and a national rate of 66.8%. While the NYIC, our partner organizations, and NYC Census 2020 have shown amazing efforts to continue working on the self-response rate, the Census has been subject to many headwinds with which we are all familiar:

- The continued assault of the Trump administration on the Census including attempts to exclude undocumented immigrants from the apportionment count and the shortening of the Census deadlines
- The confusion over the end-date of the Census as a result of the Trump administration's insistence on delivering the apportionment count on 12/31/20
- The diminishing number of groups on the ground able to do Census outreach work due to funding running out
- The lack of support from the Census Bureau in providing MQAs at events which has proven to be an effective way of counting our historically under-counted communities.

While the total household enumerated number appears to be good, as Meeta Anand has further explained, this number does not tell the complete picture. As we chase towards the finish line, we must continue to do everything we can to further encourage self-response. The communities at risk of being undercounted are, not coincidentally, the same ones most affected by COVID-19. The uneven devastation of the pandemic is yet another brutal reminder of the structural racism many of our City's communities face, including the health inequities that are partly due to chronic underfunding in communities where funding is most needed.

### **What recent work have we been doing**

In the initial months after COVID-19 first hit, we found that our work was limited to digital and

social media efforts. While those efforts were helpful, we also found that in-person events proved to be as important as we thought they would be. Tabling at highly-trafficked areas, transit centers, hospitals and food distribution sites has proven to be incredibly important. Incentives, such as swag, gift-cards and other giveaways, such as partnerships with businesses, have also proven to be highly effective.

In recent months we have also:

- Hosted in-language text-banking in Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens
- Robocalls in Brooklyn from Jarrett Allen of the Brooklyn Nets, in Manhattan and Queens from Rosario Dawson and in Manhattan from Whoopi Goldberg
- Development and dissemination of multilingual Census outreach cards to be used at any events using tabling -- whether or not involving the Census
- Hosted briefings for the staff of elected officials in NYC and beyond about how they can engage in Census work.
- Promoted Census through in-language Facebook ad-buys.

NYC Census has engaged well in pivoting to outdoor strategies and blanketing all five boroughs. Phone-banking continues, and tabling events were regularly scheduled, as well as partnerships with well-known names such as the Brooklyn Nets or public hospitals.

### **What is Left to Be Done**

**Disseminate:** : With the Census Bureau wrapping up its enumeration efforts within the next 36 hours, we urge elected officials to not only mention the Census at every single event that is constituent-facing, but to leverage any connection they have in getting the word out. We are at the ready to help in promoting any event or idea.

**Advocate:** The uncertainty of the end of Census had caused confusion, whiplash and draining groups of necessary resources. We are also concerned that the lack of a proper length of time for data processing will lead to even more distortions that will hurt our communities of color. We need to do everything we can to make sure Congress extends the statutory reporting deadlines for the Census.

**Empower:** Despite Census enumeration coming to an end, City Council still has an opportunity to make sure New Yorker's voices are heard. This city, home to over 3 million immigrant New Yorkers, many of whom held the front lines for us during the peak of pandemic response are left out of the electoral process. We urge your support for Introduction 1867, to empower 900,000 New Yorkers with lawful presence with a vote in local elections, a step towards acknowledging the diverse voices and expanding representation in our city.

We are proud of what NYC has done in face of an unprecedented pandemic and an administration hostile to a successful Census. What we have learned from the past two years is that when we work collectively, we can achieve great results, even in light of a pandemic and an antagonizing administration. Thank you to all of you for your attention to this issue and your partnership.



New York  
Public  
Library



QUEENS  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY

New York City Council

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS  
OVERSIGHT HEARING –  
“The 2020 Census in New York”

Wednesday, October 14, 2020

**Introduction**

Good afternoon. I am Jay Brandon, the Civic Engagement and Community Partnerships Manager, of The New York Public Library (NYPL). I am joined by my colleagues Iman Powe-Maynard, Civic Engagement Manager of Brooklyn Public Library (BPL), and Jin Hyun Bae, Civic Engagement Manager of Queens Public Library (QPL). We would like to thank City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, Chair Fernando Cabrera and members of this committee, Census Task Force Co-Chairs Council Members Carlina Rivera and Carlos Menchaca, and all members of the City Council for holding this hearing today and for your tireless support of libraries and services we provide to New Yorkers. Additionally, we would like to thank NYC Census 2020 Director Julie Menin and the entire NYC Census 2020 team, citywide partners, complete count fund (CCF) awardees, and the U.S. Census Bureau’s New York Regional Office for your ongoing collaboration. We are grateful to the Council for the opportunity to testify and for your work to ensure all New Yorkers are counted in the 2020 Census.

For over a century, New York City libraries have served as vital community hubs. With 217 libraries across our diverse city, we stand as the most trusted, open and democratic institutions and reliable sources of information in the United States. As essential providers of information and opportunity for all, libraries are aptly suited to ensure every New Yorker is counted and disseminate resources on the decennial Census. As key citywide partners, the three library systems developed a proposal that reinforced our strength as community conveners, provided crucial technology and internet access, and offered a trusted and safe space for patrons to be counted.

In preparation for our work to support the Census, The New York Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library, and Queens Public Library created an exhaustive plan to connect Hard-to-Count (HTC) communities to vital information and technological resources. 110 target branches citywide were identified to receive additional Census support, technology, collateral, and programming. We teamed up with the U.S. Census Bureau to host hundreds of Census job recruitment sessions in our branches to build early awareness, and drive self-response rates. We prepared hundreds of dedicated devices to allow for quick and easy access to the Census website, averting possible scams and long lines for public computers. To ensure patrons fully participated in the Census at our neighborhood branches, the three library systems collaborated on a culturally competent marketing campaign designed to engage New York City’s diverse communities and drive self-response rates.

Each library system hired a team of multilingual Census Navigators, who began visiting branches, training library staff, reaching out to CCF awardees and other partners, and preparing to launch Census programming. BPL's Navigators began visiting every BPL location -- 59 in total -- to deliver comprehensive Census and customer service training to each staff team. In addition to its own comprehensive staff training, QPL's Navigators assisted in information sessions for frontline staff, children's librarians and after-school specialists, and established new or deeper connections with organizations working with undercounted populations. QPL collaborated with Council Members Daniel Dromm and Barry Grodenchik to host recruitment fairs at Elmhurst, Glen Oaks, Bellerose and Queens Village libraries. NYPL's Navigators scheduled Census Cafes, public programs offering Census information in English and Spanish, and established partnerships with organizations such as the Apollo Theatre and National Black Leadership Commission on Health to reinforce the importance of the Census in familiar community spaces.

Along with NYC Census 2020 and other citywide partners, libraries began preparing for citywide open house events on April 1 (Census Day), planning "We Count" family storytimes, cultural events to attract new patrons, and interactive programs to welcome all New Yorkers, specifically those most affected by the digital divide.. Census messaging was incorporated into existing channels such as ESOL classes, New Americans workshops, early literacy storytimes, and older adult programming.

By the week of March 12th, the official launch of the Census self-response period, libraries were fully prepared to execute a sophisticated, comprehensive, full-scale in-person campaign to get an accurate count through engaging programming, easily accessible kiosks with technology at branches, fully trained staff, and partnerships with local CBOs ... and then everything changed.

### **COVID-19 Pivot**

The COVID-19 pandemic affected New York City's libraries as it did many other organizations, causing a sudden shutdown of our physical locations and disrupting our ability to carry out much of the planned in-person, community-based Census outreach. Even as physical branches were shuttered, the three systems continued to provide a wide range of services citywide, boosting our digital collections and shifting our programming and engagement online. And as New Yorkers adjusted to the new realities in their daily lives, Libraries have continued to prioritize sharing news, resources and information about the Census with New Yorkers. As a trusted voice in our communities, particularly during this difficult time, when we speak about the importance of the Census, our patrons take note.

At the onset of the pandemic, we informed our patrons about the importance of filling out the Census through a range of online programming, including multilingual storytimes, ESOL classes, author talks, and older adult programs, which reach historically undercounted populations. BPL's Navigators launched a regular Census Q&A series across BPL's flagship social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram); and worked with the CUNY Census corps team and other community partners to host a Teen Census Panel and tele-town halls in Spanish and Bengali. QPL's Navigators brought together the U.S. Census Bureau, CUNY Census Corps, NYC Census 2020 and its partners to create a series of 10 informational Q&A videos, live and pre-recorded. Summoning the QPL slogan, "We Speak Your Language," each of these sessions were conducted in a different language spoken in Queens. In addition, QPL created Census-focused cultural programming, including Dance Counts (a showcase of original

performances co-produced with the CUNY Dance Initiative), and programs with its Hip-Hop Coordinator, Ralph McDaniels. With our city, state, and federal representatives, we hosted numerous virtual storytimes during which they delivered public service announcements about the Census. To date, the storytimes have garnered over 17,500 views on QPL's Facebook page. When it became apparent that southeast Queens was struggling with their self-response rate, the Library joined Council Member Adrienne Adams' strategy session with local CBOs to develop best practices to address the issue. Our Navigators played a crucial role in citywide phone-banking, as well as other engagement opportunities, specifically targeting outreach to low-responding neighborhoods, since they are Census experts who speak a variety of languages in those communities.

In addition, we continued to train and engage our staff and library volunteers to be effective Census advocates. BPL and QPL held Census Ambassador trainings, inviting volunteers, donor groups, and board members to learn how to use outreach tools and proven strategies to increase the count. QPL held regular Census update calls, open to Friends of the Library and others on the Government and Community Affairs contact list, ensuring that they had access to up-to-date information. NYPL's Census Navigators led a conversation regarding self-response rates, outreach techniques, and operational updates for approximately 230 staff, at its virtual staff conference in April.

The library systems continue to coordinate with NYC Census 2020 on social media campaigns using all flagship accounts and email blasts to patrons and other stakeholders to encourage Census participation and promotion. Our collective newsletters prominently feature Census language and reach close to two million combined subscribers. For example, NYPL regularly features Census language in its NYPL Connect and Book of the Day newsletters, reaching approximately 1.2 million subscribers. Each library system also created a Census platform that includes information about self-response and other resources. We have also launched a social media sweepstakes campaign in partnership with Planned Parenthood of New York, providing promotional support, with BPL and QPL providing prizes. Libraries continued to explore other options for engagement, including dedicated Census support lines and virtual 1-on-1 support sessions by appointment during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City.

### **Census Completion**

The Libraries' Census Navigators and partners continue to provide invaluable help participating in outreach efforts. They, along with library supporters and volunteers, have safely expanded Census outreach into the streets, in parks, responsibly at gatherings and more as our neighbors return to the "new normal".

Recognizing that one in five New York City residents does not have access to reliable broadband access, and that some may not engage with virtual offerings, the three Library systems worked to bring Census messaging to people's doorsteps. In collaboration with NYC Census, we conducted a direct mail campaign to target low-responding neighborhoods across the City. Direct mailing was complemented with other analog strategies, such as multilingual posters in high-priority neighborhoods, posters in bodegas and laundromats, door hangers, and signage on library branch windows. Most recently, QPL conducted a week-long mobile digital billboard campaign with a truck driving throughout Queens, from the Rockaways to College Point to Corona and Long Island City.

BPL purchased wireless-enabled tablets that were fashioned into mobile units available for Census “pop-up sites” wherever they were needed. Earlier this summer, BPL put resources into Chinese-language outreach in South Sunset Park, connected with the evangelical communities in Central Brooklyn and East New York, and reached Spanish speakers across the borough, from Williamsburg, to Bushwick, to Canarsie. BPL’s collaboration with the YMCA of Greater New York and NYC Census produced two “Call out the Count” virtual phone banking sessions in August and September, reaching over 4,700 households. BPL’s Census Navigators partnered with the U.S. Census Bureau to re-engage with BPL branches and began tabling outside our sites in HTC neighborhoods. They also conducted outreach with the various partners around Brooklyn, from community boards to churches to affordable housing units in low-response neighborhoods.

In August, BPL’s bookmobile joined the NYC Census March for Racial Justice Caravan, which traveled from Sunset Park to Prospect Park. In September, the Library held two "Census Tailgate" events in Crown Heights and at the New Lots branch, featuring the bookmobile, back to school giveaways, music, and food distribution from the Campaign Against Hunger. At the end of the month, BPL hosted “Skate for the Census” outside our Macon branch, which provided free roller skate rentals to participants who completed the census. BPL promoted census completion through direct mailings in partnership with NYC Census, messaging on Link NYC screens, and production of a PSA that ran in 58 waiting rooms across hospitals and doctor’s offices in Brooklyn. Additionally, six billboards were placed in high traffic locations in HTC neighborhoods throughout Brooklyn, and installed self-check kiosks with Census messaging at our grab-and-go service branches, and also encouraged census completion through direct mailings in partnership with NYC Census, wild postings, messaging on Link NYC screens, and production of a PSA that ran in n 58 waiting rooms in hospitals and doctor’s offices across Brooklyn. Additionally, BPL recently donated 58 cases of the “We Count” 2020 Census picture book to partners - including Make the Road NY, Center for Family Life, CAMBA and the New York City Public Advocate’s Office. We continue to be creative with the resources we can make available for partners as we all broaden our outreach and impact.

Earlier this summer, NYPL collaborated with local stakeholders to integrate Census messaging in the delivery of services and resources. Collaborations with Uptown Grand Central in East Harlem helped connect Census messaging to the Latinx community, and partnerships with Assembly Members Yuh-Line Niou and Charles Fall strategically targeted diverse communities in the Lower East Side in Manhattan and the neighborhood of Stapleton on Staten Island; both neighborhoods had proportionally low self-response rates. Eventually as the city began to reopen NYPL offered more in-person outreach events in collaboration with partners.

As NYPL began its first phase of branch reopenings, we partnered with the U.S. Census Bureau to establish outdoor tabling events in a scaffolded approach that utilized our street-fronts as enumeration hubs. Initially, outreach events started with eight branches, focusing on increasing self-response rates in these areas. As additional branches were added, the U.S. Census Bureau identified branches that could support low self-response neighborhoods such as Parkchester in the Bronx, Stapleton on Staten Island, and areas of the Lower East Side. As popularity grew, so did our partners. NYPL collaborated with local and statewide elected officials as well as NYC Census’s citywide partners, and continue to do so. Assembly Members Yuh-line Niou, Michael Blake and Nathalia Fernandez, as well as City Council

Members Vanessa Gibson and Mark Gjonaj partnered with us to publicize and provide critical PPE and school supplies for their constituents at mobile questionnaire assistance events (MQA). These integral engagement events helped to enumerate over 200 individuals. These collaborations coupled with our virtual programs ensured that we engaged our constituents virtually and in person. NYPL co-hosted the program “Community Actions, Benefits & The Census,” with Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, where viewers could directly ask questions of the U.S. Census Bureau Regional Director, Jeff Behler. Approximately 50 viewers participated in this virtual program. Following the success of that event, NYPL also hosted “Do You Know? The Impacts of A Census Undercount” with Assembly Member Michael Blake in September. We continue to host and to facilitate virtual programs for our patrons and staff to keep them informed on key Census updates, shifts in our plan and ways they can be involved. To ensure staff have key Census details on updated messaging and engagement opportunities, NYPL prepares weekly Census email for frontline branch staff.

In Queens, Queens Public Library continues to deepen connections and improve coordination with our partners working in the Latinx communities of North Corona and East Elmhurst, Chinese-speaking communities in College Point and Flushing, South Asian language-speaking communities in Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park, as well as South East Queens and the Rockaways.

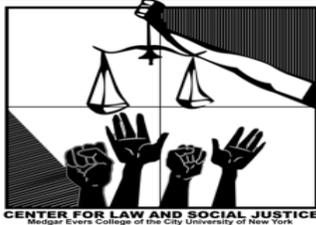
QPL’s Census Team helped the library host and support the U.S. Census Bureau and community partners with MQA events across multiple library locations. Beyond the library, our team also conducted outreach with the Queens Borough President’s office, NYC Census 2020, and Complete Count Committee members at outdoor food distribution sites, health events, transit hubs, and other places that draw large numbers of people. The Census Navigators were deployed so that their language skills could be used to the fullest advantage. The Friends of the Library also provided support, joining Representative Ocasio-Cortez’s Census outreach in Corona. Before summer ended, QPL’s bookmobile was deployed, drawing eyes to an Richmond Hill event organized with the Queens Borough President’s office and community partners.

Since Labor Day, QPL has hosted five Census back-to-school events co-hosted with our Library Friends. We also co-organized “Queens Gets Counted!” with Queens Night Market, Queens Museum, and ABNY. This was Queens’ marquee event for the most recent NYC Census Week of Action, which combined a virtual event with about 30 in-person outreach events. While final numbers are not in, we have already confirmed that more than 400 households were counted at eight of these sites. In addition, we deployed street teams who counted 1,100 households in Flushing, Corona, Richmond Hill and South Richmond Hill. Going into the last weeks of the Census, QPL plans to continue supporting organizations doing in-person outreach. In October, QPL supported the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, Chhaya CDC, Adhikaar, and the National Black Leadership Conference, and plans to add more to the list.

Due to the concerted outreach of Brooklyn Public Library, New York Public Library, Queens Public Library, and our partners, New York City has seen a steady increase in several Hard-to-Count communities over the last two months. Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island have seen their self-response rates beat their 2010 rates. This is impressive, considering that Brooklyn and Queens have the highest percentages of HTC populations in New York State. We also have the benefit of real-time self-response data and the expertise of Census coalition partners to help inform our outreach efforts.

From the start, we all knew that achieving a 2020 Census complete count in NYC was going to be a challenge; the added complications of undertaking the Census at the epicenter of a pandemic have been extraordinary. But, New York City's libraries have taken on that challenge! Although we've had to pivot quickly, our partnerships with the NYC Census 2020 office, U.S. Census Bureau, dedicated elected officials, and CCC awardees and grantees, among others have been invaluable as we work towards a complete count.. As we enter the homestretch we feel confident that the Libraries' plans have evolved sensibly and strategically, we have leveraged our resources, and we have safely engaged with as many New Yorkers as possible to ensure a complete and accurate count despite the pandemic.

We are committed to continuing this important work with you. With vital resources and representation at stake our libraries remain as steadfast as ever in ensuring that every New York City resident is counted.



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**TESTIMONY OF**

**THE CENTER FOR LAW AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

**before the**

**New York City Governmental Operations Committee and the**

**2020 Census Task Force**

**on**

**On-going Census Outreach in NYC Communities of African  
Descent During COVID-19**

**June 22, 2020**

Prepared by:

**Lurie Daniel Favors, Esq.**  
**Interim Executive Director**  
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**Center for Law and Social Justice at**  
**Medgar Evers College, CUNY**



**CENTER FOR LAW AND  
SOCIAL JUSTICE**  
AT MEDGAR EVERS COLLEGE,  
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Chairman Cabrera and members of the Subcommittee: My name is Lurie Daniel Favors and I serve as the Interim Executive Director of the Center for Law and Social Justice. I am a civil rights attorney with 15 years of experience advocating for the protection of the racial justice and civil rights of Black New Yorkers. The Center for Law and Social Justice (CLSJ) is a unit of Medgar Evers College of The City University of New York. Founded in 1986 by means of a New York State legislative grant, the mission of CLSJ is to provide quality advocacy, and community services to New Yorkers of African descent and the disenfranchised. CLSJ seeks to accomplish its mission by conducting research, and initiating public policy advocacy projects and litigation on behalf of community organizations and groups of people of African descent and the disenfranchised which promote civil and human rights, and which further national and international understanding. Because of its unique combination of advocacy services from a community-based perspective, CLSJ is a focal point for progressive activity.

### **The Impact of COVID19 on 2020 Census Campaigns**

As the City of New York continues to slowly pull itself out of the vice grip of the COVID19 pandemic, we are clear that communities of African descent and Latinx communities are among the most severely devastated by the virus. Sadly, our recovery has been severely hampered by the fact that Pan African communities in NYC today are under served by a health care system that is only operating at a fraction of its strength. Why? Because much of our current health care capacity is funded by the 2010 and 2000 census and in those years, NYC communities of African descent and communities of color were horribly undercounted. **New York City, which has the highest population of people of Pan African descent in the US, had one of the lowest response rates during the 2010 and 2000 Census cycles.**

Communities like Central Brooklyn, Bronx, Queens, and parts of Manhattan and Staten Island, are just a few of the counties that are home to large percentages of “Hard-to-Count” Black populations. These populations, all of African descent, include: African Americans, Caribbean American and Caribbean immigrants, African immigrants, and Afro Latinx, and African descendent people from other areas of the globe, such as Asia, Europe, and Australia and New Zealand.

Those artificially low 2010 and 2000 Census undercounts have locked our neighborhoods into a decades long cycle of underfunding and under political representation. Today, thanks to this virus, we are still paying for the failures of past city leadership to properly prioritize census outreach. In the case of NYC communities of African descent, we are literally paying for that mistake with our lives. We cannot allow that to happen again.

### **Investing in the Census Today Determines The Shape of Our City Tomorrow**

The next several years in this City will be defined by a post COVID19 recovery effort, the likes of which many of us have never seen. New York City will continue to face the challenges related to educating children under the umbrella of a virus that has no known vaccine. New Yorkers will wrestle with how to provide food for the countless numbers of residents who have no access to healthy meals, except for what they can secure in a food distribution center. We will grapple with what it means to have significant numbers of our community members rendered functionally unemployable as service industries completely re-invent themselves in order to minimize exposure to the virus. These community members will have no choice but to turn to work force development and job retraining programs so that they can attempt to secure employment in other industries. As ridership on public transportation returns to recognizable numbers, the demand for sanitized transportation options will increase. Soon, protections for renters and homeowners who cannot afford to make their monthly payments will end and the ensuing eviction and foreclosure crisis will threaten to topple many communities, forcing untold numbers to search for new housing options. As those who are embarking on the long term recovery from this virus continue to age, they will increasingly rely on senior services to help them navigate this new and frightening terrain.

Each of these areas, education, food distribution programs, workforce development, transportation, affordable housing, senior services and so much more are all funded in large part based on census data. We must ensure that you, elected City leaders, continue to properly invest in census outreach so that our 2020 Census count is as accurate as possible. This is the only way that each of these areas will have the funding they need in order to sustain our recovery as a city over the short and long term.

To date, both groups funded to engage in Census 2020 outreach, the 18 Citywide Partners and the more than 150 Complete Count Fund (“CCF”) Awardees, have done the near impossible. The Citywide Partners have continued to operate as a key census brain trust, working in heavy collaboration with the NYC Census Office to ensure that each hard to count community receives culturally competent, data driven census outreach. The Citywide Partners work in tandem with the NYC Census 2020 team and literally develop, execute and, when needed, help to recalibrate the City’s census plan. By collaborating as a 18 member census brain trust, the Citywide Partners are the census version of Voltron – disparate groups of experts united and operating as one machine to ensure that each of our groups, the 150 CCF Awardees, and by extension, each of our communities, have the requisite, data driven birds-eye view needed to ensure census coverage for all of our communities.

Over the past fiscal year, each of our organizations has contributed expertise and labor in an effort to ensure that neither the NYC Census office, Citywide Partners nor the 150 CCF Awardees are operating in silos. In the wake of a deadly virus, the Citywide Partners have continued to work together across boroughs, specialty areas and cultural groupings to ensure the continued success of the largest citywide census outreach effort in the country.

The federal Census Bureau extended its calendar out of the correct understanding that the virus dictates the calendar. The New York City Council must recognize the same. As NYC begins the process of reopening, we are in need of another pivot. None of us know exactly how to reopen a city during a pandemic. But we, this finely tuned body of NYC census experts, are well schooled in the ability of nimbly adjusting our census messaging and outreach efforts so that we can absorb each blow this virus can dish out, and respond in kind. As the City comes back to life, we have the ability to make up for lost time. We are turning our census campaigns from primarily online and phone based outreach to engaging with New Yorkers in food distribution centers and other points of mutual aid. That work must be allowed to continue into the summer months so that our communities will not be locked into a partial recovery marked by the pains of being under funded and resourced because of a COVID19 triggered census undercount.

## Recommendations

The 150 CCF Awardees received permission to roll their census funds over into the next fiscal year. It is imperative that this body permit the Citywide Partners to do the same. This is how we ensure the continued success of this census campaign.

We need both of these groups to continue working during the summer. The Citywide Partners must be allowed to roll over any remaining funding into the next fiscal year and frankly, some of these groups may even need additional funds. We must use the summer months to ensure our communities are counted. While the Center for Law and Social Justice is in the unique position of being a Citywide Partner that *is* able to roll our remaining funds over, we need this body of experts to continue operating so that our campaign is as successful as possible. CLSJ has decades of expertise in Pan African community affairs and yet, working in collaboration with each of these groups over the past year has shown us how much more effective we are when we have access to the brilliance of the NYC Citywide Partners Census Brain Trust.

For those reasons, it is imperative that Citywide Partners be allowed to roll over any remaining census funds. To do otherwise is to effectively cut the City's census outreach efforts off at the knees. Rolling over the funds and the work into the next fiscal year is how the City's census experts will continue educating and empowering CCF Awardees and community residents to both understand and engage with the census while coming out from under the auspices of deadly pandemic. The survival of our communities over the next decades literally depends on our ability to continue census work through this summer so that we can make up for the time that the virus stole from us. It is for that reason that we ask the City Council to allow each of the Citywide Partners to roll over any remaining census funds into the next fiscal year in order to support continued extensive census outreach in summer 2020.

Thank you.



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**New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations  
Oversight Hearing - Complete 2020 Census Count  
Council Member Fernando Cabrera, Chair**

**Testimony of Lena Cohen, United Neighborhood Houses  
October 14, 2020**

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on the importance of ensuring every New Yorker is counted in the 2020 Census. In this moment of adjustment and in the wake of a global health crisis, UNH is continuing to promote the 2020 Census by helping settlement houses work together to use our collective power and ensure that plans to promote Census self-response rates can adapt and move forward, particularly in historically undercounted communities.

United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing 44 neighborhood settlement houses that reach 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers.

**Complete Count in the 2020 Census**

UNH commends the City for committing \$40 million to fund community-based outreach and mobilization to promote self-responses to the 2020 Census, and is grateful to the City Council for supporting UNH as part of its Census Initiative. Before COVID-19, New York was already at risk for a significant undercount due to reduced federal funding for Census workers and the reliance on the digitization of the self-response process. COVID-19 has dramatically impacted and upturned many of our 2020 Census field tactics. Given the current pandemic and economic crisis we are now in, UNH and our member settlement houses have shifted our outreach techniques away from in-person events to more heavily rely on virtual platforms including social media, online pledge cards, emails, video streams, text-banks, and phone-banks.

The dangers of an undercount would dilute New York's congressional representation and jeopardize a decade's worth of public services – about \$800 billion nationally and \$53 billion in New York State per year – both of which would disproportionately harm immigrants, children, and low-income communities. To combat these challenges and ensure all New Yorkers are

fairly and accurately counted, UNH is committed to continuing our Census-related work with settlement houses and other community-based organizations to provide education, outreach, and technical assistance in culturally appropriate ways. UNH believes that a strong coordinated effort across the City's CBOs will strategically help to reach populations based on geography and demographics that will ensure a valid and complete Census count.

With support from the City Council, UNH has been a Citywide Census Partner over the last year, which allowed us to support settlement houses leading Census work in their communities and work closely with the NYC Census Office to ensure that all CBOs providing social services are part of the City's Census outreach strategy. Citywide Census Partners play an essential role in coordinating Complete Count Fund awardees because of our relationships with the many organizations working to integrate Census support in programs, services, and conversations with communities that would otherwise be excluded from the enumeration process.

As a Citywide Census Partner, UNH has been able to support our 19 member settlement houses that received Complete Count Fund awards, as well as other settlement houses leading Census-related work independent from NYC Counts 2020 funding. Our work to-date includes:

- Organizing "Get Out the Count" events for the UNH network to use the peer-to-peer texting tool, Hustle. This tool allows us to reach hundreds of New Yorkers within minutes with a text encouraging them to fill out the Census and providing the link to the Census Bureau's self-response website. UNH provides training and technical assistance to anyone that registers for these events;
- Helping settlement houses embed Census messaging in programs such as adult literacy classes, child care, and after-school programs, and organizational processes such as intake, community events, and orientation, both before and after COVID-19;
- Providing community outreach lists of contact information with accompanying scripts that promote the Census for settlement houses that are reaching out to community members through phone calls about ways to stay connected during social distancing;
- Supporting the NYC Census 2020 office to provide direct training support to front-line staff that are well-positioned to help community members respond to the Census but need coaching and technical assistance to utilize virtual engagement tools;
- Informing UNH members on changes to the U.S. Census Bureau's schedule for self-response, non-response follow-up, group quarter enumeration, and employment.
- Participate in Citywide Census Partners (CWP) meetings to stay connected with other umbrella organizations leading similar work, and to identify geographic gaps in citywide Census outreach;
- Convene a peer learning group via Zoom to continue connecting settlement house staff that are leading Census work. These meetings provide an opportunity to (1) share tips and strategies for transitioning to remote-based Census engagement, (2) identify specific challenges that settlement houses operating on government-funded Census contracts face in the curtailment of in-person activities, and (3) uplift challenges to city and state officials. This group will continue meeting throughout the summer of 2020 to

coordinate Census education and outreach in ongoing programs and activities across the settlement house network; and

- Developing locally-relevant and translated educational resources customized to reflect the importance of the Census in conjunction with the issues that local communities identify such as neighborhood profiles, Census 101 presentations, and Census-themed activities.

### **Civic Engagement in New York City**

In addition to uplifting the Census as a critical civic engagement opportunity, UNH has incorporated voter engagement and election reform into our conversations with settlement houses to improve accountability between undercounted communities and their elected officials. Immigrant New Yorkers have not only been historically undercounted in the Census but also disenfranchised from elections despite having lived, worked, raised families, and paid billions of dollars in taxes to New York City each year. From their earliest days UNH and settlement houses have worked together to encourage greater civic engagement and mobilization of communities to advocate for good public policies that invest in and enhance our neighborhoods. Yet nearly one million New Yorkers can't vote in local elections due to their citizenship status.

UNH urges the City Council to pass **Int. 1867**, legislation that would amend the City Charter to permit lawfully present residents and those with work authorizations to vote in municipal elections, such as races for mayor, comptroller, public advocate, borough president, and city council, as well as referenda and other local contests. The legislation would also allow residents to join political parties, and vote in primary elections for municipal offices. Under its terms, a noncitizen would be qualified to vote in municipal elections if she or he is (1) a lawfully permanent resident or authorized to work in the United States; (2) a resident of New York City for at least 30 days; and (3) otherwise qualified to register to vote under New York State election law once exempted from the requirement that she or he possess United States citizenship.

In the wake of COVID-19, civic, economic, social disparities between individuals with varying citizenship statuses have never been more stark. Immigrant New Yorkers who would be impacted by the proposed legislation are holding the front lines of the pandemic, performing essential work that is sustaining our communities. Yet these individuals have been disproportionately underserved by the latest economic relief packages from the federal government, which have excluded immigrants from the support they need to continue holding our city together.

The current pandemic highlights the critical need for expanded enfranchisement to ensure all New York City residents have a say in the direction of our city. The pandemic doesn't discriminate based on immigration status, and neither should our rights to participate in our democracy and communities. Expanding the right to vote in municipal elections to residents

with legal status would provide more New Yorkers with the opportunity to have a say on issues that affect them and strengthen the voices of all our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for the Council's leadership on these critical issues.

*For more information, please contact Lena Cohen at [lcohen@unhny.org](mailto:lcohen@unhny.org) / (212) 967-0322 x 313.*

**TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK**

**New York City Council  
Committee on Governmental Operations  
Oversight –Complete 2020 Census Count More Critical than Ever**

**Submitted by:**

**Ariel Savransky**

**UJA-Federation of New York**

**October 14, 2020**

Thank you, Chairperson Cabrera and members of the Committees on Government Operations, for the opportunity to provide testimony on the 2020 Census. My name is Ariel Savransky and I am an Advocacy and Policy Advisor at UJA-Federation of New York. Established more than 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to UJA's mission is to care for those in need. UJA identifies and meets the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere, connecting people to their communities and responding to crises both locally and around the world. UJA supports nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services. On behalf of UJA, our network of nonprofit partners and those we serve, thank you for holding this hearing to discuss the plans in place to ensure that every New Yorker is counted in the 2020 Census.

The 2020 Census continues to pose a critical threat to low-income and hard to count communities in New York City. The census determines how billions of dollars in federal funds will be distributed, including funds for safety net programs such as public housing, food assistance, Medicaid, childcare, and Head Start. The census also determines the apportionment of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and therefore impacts communities' political representation. It is critical that an accurate count takes place.

Unfortunately, low-income, minority and immigrant communities are inherently prone to being undercounted for a variety of reasons. These include: home addresses may not be included in census address rosters, a fear of government and privacy concerns, language barriers, complex household relationships and highly mobile populations with multiple addresses (such as renters). Furthermore, the impact of the pandemic, combined with changes to census collection, this year makes an undercount even more likely, evidenced by country-wide self-response rates still over 12% behind where they were the same time in 2010. As such, the census is one more potential blow to securing rights and resources for those who can least afford their loss.

Because of the potential undercount in many of the faith communities that UJA is a part of, UJA-Federation in partnership with FPWA, Catholic Charities, Council of People's Organizations and the Interfaith Center formed the Interfaith Census 2020 Count Coalition with the goal of bringing together faith leaders in neighborhoods that have historically been undercounted to raise awareness and help community members complete the census. Over the past year, the Interfaith Census 2020 Count Coalition has had hundreds of faith leaders pledge to get their congregations and communities counted. The coalition also assembled a Faith Leader Census Toolkit and dozens of additional resources and tools to help faith leaders talk about the census from a faith-based perspective and organize their communities and houses of worship.

UJA also awarded a series of grants to UJA partner agencies to supplement the extensive list of city census awardees and increase the coverage of those areas with large numbers of hard-to-count ultra-Orthodox Jews. UJA has facilitated census programming for the 12 UJA-funded organizations and has helped partners transition to integrating census education, engagement and survey completion into existing services they are not virtually providing for their communities. The majority of census funded grantees have continued to do census work through the extended October deadline. Furthermore, UJA has been collaborating with partners at the city, state and federal level.

### ***Community-Based and City-Wide Organizational Outreach Works***

Despite the now months-long lockdown and being an epicenter for the global Coronavirus pandemic, New York City's census self-response rate has continued to go up and the gap between the New York City and the national response rates has continued to narrow over the last few months. However, like the national self-response rate, New York City's self-response rate is still short of where it was in 2010, and there is still more to do. Notwithstanding the many challenges and unknowns in the early weeks of the

pandemic, census grantees pivoted to socially distanced and digital outreach strategies relatively quickly to adapt to changing circumstances. Some of the creative ways UJA partners engaged their communities are bulleted below:

- Hosted multiple events to encourage people to self-respond to the 2020 Census by offering free ice cream through what they dubbed the census Ice Cream Truck. They had one event in Forest Hills and one event in Rego Park and had nearly 50 completes on one day in Rego Park and nearly 75 on the other day in Forest Hills.
- Had a media truck going around to major commercial corridors in heavily Bukharian Jewish populated areas advertising a video the organization had produced and encouraging people to fill out the census now with the updated timeline.
- Educated and influenced individuals by integrating census messaging into the distribution of materials for which there was great need: prepared meals, basic food necessities (canned goods, dairy, fruits and vegetables), backpacks, school supplies, masks, paper goods, and toiletries. This organization highlighted that they were able to forge new relationships and strengthen longstanding ones with social service agencies, clergy, and individuals.
- Engaged in digital media outreach through e-newsletters and published posts on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Engaged in direct client engagement (with approximately 200 clients each month) at clinics, client events, and via Telehealth. Collaborated with partner organizations to include flyers in Jewish Program kosher meal delivery packages and other Food Delivery packages.
- Included census messaging in faith services, workout classes, wellness check-in calls and other programming that was provided virtually over the last seven months.
- Set up a census booth during a massive free mask distribution of over 400,000 masks and census pop-up sites at major synagogues in Boro Park before the Jewish High Holidays.

***Houses of Worship and Community-Based Organizations continue to be trusted voices and provide support to vulnerable communities***

Even before the pandemic, the economic fallout, and the protests in response to police brutality, faith leaders and CBOs have provided invaluable support to the most vulnerable communities. Faith-based institutions and their communities are vital aspects of the civic infrastructure of New York City. Faith leaders are unique in their ability to convene diverse populations, historically serve as mediators between communities and government, and intimately know the needs of local people. Faith leaders provide spiritual, emotional, and practical guidance to their congregations through good times and bad, serving as trusted sources of information.

Over the last few months, CBOs and Houses of worship have closed, and they have grappled with the struggles of supporting and providing guidance during the pandemic. Many have faced increased COVID-19 related deaths among their peers and communities and had to help families make funeral arrangements.

Still, many faith leaders and CBOs continued to push forward and support census outreach and education within their communities in a socially distant manner, especially in the last month or two as the impact of the pandemic has somewhat abated. Some houses of worship have successfully transitioned to digital or over the phone religious services. Through announcements or as part of religious services, many have encouraged their congregations to respond to the census. Both CBOs and Houses of Worship have shared

information on their social media accounts, or through their newsletters; conducted outreach to their congregation and communities about the census as part of wellness checks; and have developed community specific census infographics, fliers, and shareable content that has been widely distributed.

With increasing food insecurity in many communities, food pantries and other emergency services are seeing increased usage. As these services have adapted to comply with public health guidance, this has been one of the few methods used to reach members of the community that may not have been reachable otherwise. Several partners have included census messaging in the food packages distributed while others have assisted, from a distance, as individuals fill out the census while waiting on a food distribution line.

Faith leaders are likely to continue to face challenges in the coming years, including declining attendance, an aging congregation, gentrification, underinvestment in social services combined with rising needs among the most vulnerable. Strengthening their capacity, skills, and connection to others in their community is essential to helping them mitigate these challenges and engage them in the important work ahead.

The Interfaith Census 2020 Count Coalition project sought to understand, adapt, and grow collective skills to work with, support, and mobilize communities of faith. As a result of this effort, UJA, in partnership with the Interfaith Census 2020 Count Coalition, makes the following recommendations to continue to strengthen and support faith-based civic engagement and outreach:

- Step 1: Support relationship and network building activities within and across faith traditions.
- Step 2: Create messaging that comes from and resonates with communities of faith.
- Step 3: Build the organizing and technical skills of faith leaders to engage their congregations.
- Step 4: Identify strategies that align with when and how distinct faith communities convene, interact, and engage.
- Step 5: Include direct community outreach to more deeply engage high priority populations.
- Step 6: Ensure the inclusion and representation of diverse faiths, backgrounds, and skills in the planning, development, and execution processes.

To set up the success of future faith leader civic engagement efforts and the ultimate success of 2030 Census response efforts, **UJA urges the Council and the Administration to make a shared commitment to invest time, energy, and resources in building a robust and long term interfaith civic engagement effort.**

### **Conclusion**

UJA appreciates the commitment of the City Council, the New York City Governmental Operations Committee, the 2020 Census Task Force, and the NYC Census Team to a complete census count, especially among the most vulnerable New Yorkers and those communities most impacted by COVID-19. If the most vulnerable communities remain undercounted, we risk compounding the challenges these communities face not just this year, but for the next ten years. Please contact Ariel Savransky at [savranskya@ujafedny.org](mailto:savranskya@ujafedny.org) or 212-836-1360 with any questions.

## **TESTIMONY**

New York City Council  
Committee on Governmental Operations  
June 22, 2020

Submitted by:  
MJ Okma  
Policy and Campaign Strategist  
Human Services Council of New York

Good afternoon Chair Cabrera and members of the New York City Council Committee on Governmental Operations. My name is MJ Okma and I am the Policy and Campaign Strategist at the Human Services Council (HSC), a membership organization representing over 170 human services providers in New York City. HSC serves our membership as a coordinating body, advocate, and an intermediary between the human services sector and government. We take on this work so that our members can focus on running their organizations and providing direct support to New Yorkers. These are the nonprofits that support our City's children, seniors, those experiencing homelessness, people with disabilities, individuals who are incarcerated or otherwise involved in the justice system, immigrants, and individuals coping with substance abuse and other mental health and behavioral challenges.

The cost of COVID-19 that has been passed along to the human services sector has been immense. In a time where these programs needed more support in order to meet a growing demand, vital services have been cut. This choice has disproportionately impacted communities that have been hardest hit by the pandemic due to structural racism, ableism, and income inequality. These cuts to programs further display why an accurate count to the 2020 Census is so important. Our City's historically undercounted immigrant and underserved communities are already facing the impacts of disproportionate funding cuts at the City and State level; we cannot afford to also lose billions in federal funding due to an inaccurate Census count.

For New Yorkers who are currently unable to vote, the Census is one the only ways they can directly leverage the resources that their communities need. As we are here today for a hearing centered around the political power of all New Yorkers being counted, we must also stress the urgent need to pass Int. 1867, which is co-sponsored by Council Member Rodriguez and Chair Cabrera. This bill would expand access to the local ballot to nearly 900,000 New Yorkers by allowing green card holders and residents authorized to work in the United States to vote in elections for city-level offices.

New York City is home to more than 3 million immigrants who contribute billions of dollars to our economy and expand the cultural and social vitality of our city. These New Yorkers are also playing a vital role in our COVID-19 response—working as delivery workers, the cab drivers, the nursing assistants, and in other often low-wage jobs that have recently been widely-recognized essential. Yet despite all this, many immigrants cannot vote in local elections and have no say on the issues that affect them the most. Our current health crisis only adds to the urgency of Int. 1867 as these communities have also been left out of federal relief efforts. This bill is a chance for our City to step up and become a leader in voting rights by showing that our local government is engaged with and accountable to all its residents.

The goal of Int. 1867, much like the goal of an accurate Census count, is to ensure that as many New Yorkers as possible have a say in the resources and representation granted to their communities. This bill is completely legal and does not conflict with any of our existing laws or with the New York State constitution.

Human Services Council along with the over 50 other members of the Our City, Our Vote coalition strongly urge all council members who are not currently supporting Int. 1987 to sign on, vote it out of committee, and pass this important bill as soon as possible.

Thank you so much for this opportunity to testify.

MJ Okma  
Policy and Campaign Strategist, Human Services Council  
[okmam@humanservicescouncil.org](mailto:okmam@humanservicescouncil.org)

## **Our City, Our Vote Partner Organizations**

Adhikaar, African Communities Together, American Pakistani Advocacy Group, Arab American Association of NY, Arab American Family Support Center, Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund, CAAAV, CHHAYA CDC, Chinese Progressive Association, Chinese-American Planning Council, Cidado Global, Coalition for Asian American Children & Families, Demos, Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), DSI International Inc, East Side House Settlement, Educational Alliance, Faith in New York, Federation of Indigenous Peoples' of Nepal in America (FIPNA), Goddard Riverside Community Center, Grand Street Settlement, Inc., Hispanic Federation, Human Services Council, Indo-Caribbean Alliance, Inc., Jacob Riis Neighborhood Center, Latino Justice PRLDEF, Literacy Assistance Center, MASA, Minkwon Center for Community Action, National Action Network, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People NY, New York Immigration Coalition, New Sanctuary Coalition, NYC Council's Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus, NYC Council's Progressive Caucus, Nonprofit New York, Queens Community House, Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York (ROC-United), S.T.O.P., Sampreshan TV Show, Shetu Inc., South Asians for America, Street Vendor Project, Sunnyside Community Services, The Black Institute, Unite Here Local 100, United Neighborhood Houses, United Sherpa Association, University Student Senate at CUNY, VOCAL New York, Women Creating Change.

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**Census  
2020**

Jeff T. Behler  
Regional Director  
New York Regional Census Center

# 2020 Census Operational Adjustments Due to COVID-19

Activity/Operation	Original Schedule	Proposed New Schedule
<b>Self-Response Phase</b>  Online, phone, and mailed self-responses continue throughout the data collection process.	March 12-July 31, 2020	March 12-October 31, 2020
<b>Nonresponse Follow-up (NRFU)</b>	May 13-July 31, 2020	August 11-October 31, 2020
<b>Service Based Enumeration (SBE)</b>	March 30-April 1, 2020	September 22-September 24, 2020

# Nonresponse Follow-Up (NRFU)



**Selecting 30,000 residents of NYC to complete operation**



**Focus on language skills first**



**Targeted hiring**



**Revised training to reduce classroom-style training**

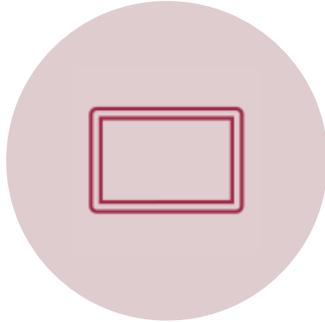


**PPE**



**Goal for staff in production – 13,000**

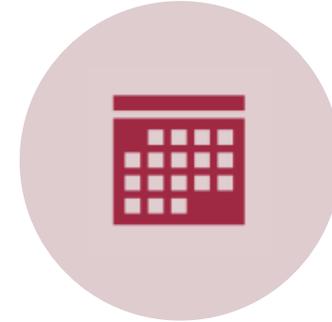
# Mobile Questionnaire Assistance



SLOWLY BEGINNING MQA  
SUPPORT IN LIMITED  
FASHION



AWAITING FINAL HQ  
APPROVAL TO RE-LAUNCH  
REVISED VERSION OF  
MQA



PROJECTED APPROVAL IN  
EARLY JULY

# Additional Mailing



Bilingual postcard mailed to non-responding households in MO/MB areas



Reminder that enumerators will be visiting soon



Census URL and toll-free telephone numbers to respond



Scheduled for late July

# Surge Week



Goal: Replicate Census Day/Week experience at DMA level



Integrated paid media, local earned media, outreach support, and tailored creative



NYC scheduled for last week of July



Possible Pre-surge media to build awareness (traditional + digital)



Partners push digital/social content to audiences

# Contact Us

## Partnership Program

Phone: (212) 882-2130

Email: [new.york.rcc.partnership@2020census.gov](mailto:new.york.rcc.partnership@2020census.gov)

Website: <https://www.census.gov/partners/2020.html>

## Suspect Fraud?

Website: <https://2020census.gov/en/avoiding-fraud.html>

Phone: 1-844-330-2020

## Data Dissemination Program

Email: [census.askdata@census.gov](mailto:census.askdata@census.gov)

Phone: 1-844-ASK-DATA

Website: [www.census.gov/data/training-workshops.html](http://www.census.gov/data/training-workshops.html)



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
**Jumaane D. Williams**

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**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS  
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL  
OPERATIONS  
OCTOBER 14, 2020**

Good afternoon,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chair Fernando Cabrera and the members of the Committee on Governmental Operations for holding this oversight hearing on the 2020 Census count. I would also like to thank the Director of NYC Census 2020, Julie Menin, for the effort you and your team have put forth to ensure that all New Yorkers fill out the Census this year. Given the gravity of the impact of COVID-19 on our communities, we need our Census count to be as accurate as possible. Our Census response determines our City's fair share of federal funds – more than \$675 billion per year – for programs essential to health care, education, housing, infrastructure, economic development, transportation, and political representation.

Although the decennial Census is extremely vital to how much designated funding New York City receives, it has been – and still is – difficult to get all residents to respond. As of October 9th, 61.3 percent of New York City residents have responded to the Census online, by mail, or by phone. A statewide view of self-response rates is just as concerning, with 63.8 percent of New Yorkers across the state responding, in comparison to a national average of 66.7 percent. These statistics tell us that not only are we lagging behind the rest of the country, but our City could potentially exhibit the same response trends that we have had in the past. Certain neighborhoods, like Washington Heights in Manhattan, Fort Totten in Queens, and Co-Op City in the Bronx, have higher response rates than the rest of the City. Other neighborhoods, such as Corona and South Ozone Park in Queens, and East New York and Borough Park in Brooklyn have low response rates, following a historical trend. What is the Administration doing right now to ensure a full and meticulous response from the residents of these neighborhoods?

I understand that both the City and the State have launched a series of efforts to promote Census participation across New York City. The Governor created the New York State Complete Count Commission, and the NYS Complete Census Campaign has held conferences across the state to inform counties and CBOs about the best practices and resources to reach at-risk and hard-to-count communities. NYC Census has been actively phone banking and mass texting, and created the Neighborhood Organizing Census Committees to recruit volunteers to reach more

communities. I also want to commend NYC Census on partnering with the City University of New York and the City Council on the Complete Count Fund to support Census outreach and provide census education to New Yorkers. A collaborative effort to reach more residents is fundamental to a successful Census count. However, these initiatives are only the first steps in guaranteeing that all New Yorkers get counted.

It is important to remember that a number of residents temporarily left the City for less populated areas for the duration of the pandemic. The City has to make sure it is reaching those individuals, and informing them that the Census questionnaire is available online. It is crucial that outreach services also reach undocumented immigrants, who may fear that their information will be used to track their whereabouts and deport them. They need to know there is no citizenship question on the Census questionnaire. There also has to be interpreters for several languages available to explain the submission process. Last, but certainly not least, we cannot forget our homeless population, both street homeless and those in shelters. The City has a responsibility to ensure that local efforts around Service-Based Enumeration (SBE) are capturing the numbers of homeless individuals.

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is that when we work collaboratively towards one goal, we can accomplish it. Many of us consciously made the effort to stay home and only go outside when necessary during the height of the pandemic, and to continue to socially distance ourselves and to wear personal protective equipment, and we have managed to significantly reduce the spread of the virus. If we continue to apply a similar effort towards ensuring every New Yorker is informed about and fills out the Census, we will see a significantly higher response rate and receive the funding our City so desperately needs in order to socially and economically recover from the impact of the Coronavirus. I am eager to hear how NYC Census 2020 is making sure that all New Yorkers get counted by October 31st, and I am open to partnering with the Speaker and other members of the City Council to amplify the City's outreach and increase our Census response rate. Thank you.



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**Gale A. Brewer, Borough President**

**October 14, 2020**

**Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President  
Testimony before the NYC Council Committee on Governmental Operations  
On the 2020 Census**

I am Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer. I thank Chair Fernando Cabrera and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify.

Not only is participation in the census required by law, a complete count in this year's census is critical to providing essential federal funding for services, products, and support. For example, every student not counted translates to a loss of \$2,700 in funding for New York's public schools. Multiply that by the city's more than 1.1 million public school students, and that's a forfeiture of almost \$3 billion over 10 years.

The census is also used to determine Congressional representation. Since 1940, New York has lost 18 congressional seats and we risk losing two more. The potential loss of a second seat will occur if as few as 50,000 people fail to respond to the census. With the added challenges of the novel coronavirus, it is paramount that complete and accurate data is collected.

Manhattan's decennial census in 2010 had a self-response rate of 66.2%, which was below the national average of 74%. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors, Manhattan's self-response rate is only at 62.5% as of the end of September 2020.

We cannot dismiss the fear and confusion that may have been fueled by concerns over whether the 2020 census would collect data on the citizenship status of residents (it doesn't). This was an anticipated challenge, and I thank the many community-based organizations that serve immigrant populations for their tireless census outreach and education efforts to counter misinformation among communities with high populations of undocumented residents.

Yet this year also poses a unique and entirely unanticipated challenge to getting a comprehensive count. Due to COVID-19, many Manhattanites have relocated outside of New York City. As a result, Manhattan census tracts that traditionally reported over 75% in response rates now hover around 50%. Examples include East Midtown and the Upper East Side.

To address this problem, over the summer, I mailed postcards to 240,000 Manhattanites who live in the lowest performing census tracts. The postcards were sent as first-class mail so they would get redirected to anyone who requested to have their mail forwarded. The postcard reminded

constituents who have temporarily relocated to fill out their census form using their Manhattan-based permanent address rather than responding with their current address.

To further amplify this message, in September, I bought ad space in the *East Hampton Star* to promote awareness of the census count to remind people to fill out their census using their permanent addresses.

Finally, my office coordinated with the NY League of Women Voters to send another census postcard mailing to 35,000 Manhattan voters who had requested June 2020 primary election absentee ballots to addresses outside of New York City. My hope is that, between targeting residents from community districts with the lowest response rates and registered voters who have relocated, we can capture as many additional census responses for Manhattan as possible.

In addition to reaching Manhattanites who have relocated, my office continues the important effort of promoting the 2020 census within the borough. Last year, I established the 2020 Manhattan Complete Count Committee to aid in the achievement of a complete and accurate census. Ahead of the census, our office gathered key stakeholders and provided them with support in the form of data presentation, trainings, and workshops.

My office's nonprofit, the Manhattan Action Fund (MAF), distributed grants to support community-based organizations in their census outreach efforts. In September 2019, the MAF, with my office's own money sourced from the city, awarded \$52,000 to 12 organizations. More recently in August 2020, with funding from the NYS Empire State Development Corporation, the MAF awarded \$215,000 to 15 additional organizations.

These grants enabled organizations to conduct in-person and virtual outreach through a range of activities, from outreach bike rides to educational events and social media blasts. Prior to the 2020 census, many of these organizations had already established trust with the populations they serve, offering culturally and linguistically appropriate services and programs that meet the communities' needs. My hope is that these trusted organizations' outreach efforts provided the necessary education and support to empower residents living in Manhattan's disproportionately undercounted neighborhoods to get counted.

I also like to think outside of the box. Over the course of four days in August, I visited barber shops, nail salons and beauty parlors, restaurants, and other small businesses to distribute personal protective equipment to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Along the way, I passed out thousands of Census Fortune Cookies. These treats contained "fortunes" printed in English, Spanish, and Chinese reminding people to fill out their census. My staff and I conducted these visits in neighborhoods up and down Manhattan, including East Harlem, Harlem, Washington Heights and Inwood, Upper East Side, Upper West Side, Lower East Side, Chinatown, and Roosevelt Island.

On September 28, through my office's Back to School Day of Action, I along with over 100 volunteers, staff, and interns distributed census information, 35,000 masks, and 9,000 hand sanitizers to over 3,000 parents at about 100 Manhattan public schools. Through this effort, we reached households who had not previously received a personal reminder about the census.

As we are all aware, a successful decennial census in the United States requires an all-hands-on-deck effort from the entire nation under normal circumstances. Yet, as of March we are most certainly not living under normal circumstances. With civic trust at a modern-day low and a historic pandemic disruption, it is clear we will need the help of every volunteer, non-profit, government agency, business, and corporation to pull off this year's census.

To this end, as the self-response portion of the 2020 census wraps up in mid-October in tandem with the deployment of enumerators, I tackled the key remaining obstacle to a complete and accurate census count—access to buildings. I worked with the U.S. Census Bureau to obtain building-level addresses that needed to be visited while communicating with real estate associations such as REBNY to ensure building management companies would allow enumerators into their buildings. With proper notification and support by property owners, we can finish strong and count every Manhattanite for the 2020 census.

I look forward to working with members of the committee to bring New York City closer to complete count.



**SHARON LEE**  
Acting President

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**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF  
QUEENS BOROUGH PRESIDENT SHARON LEE**

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS  
“THE 2020 CENSUS IN NEW YORK”**

**October 14, 2020**

Good afternoon, and thank you, Chair Cabrera and members of the committee, for convening this public hearing on the importance of the 2020 Census to the five boroughs of New York City.

This Census has been quite a journey, particularly for the borough of Queens. In March, when the coronavirus hit, we found ourselves at the epicenter of the pandemic. Not surprisingly, neighborhoods like Corona and Elmhurst with high levels of COVID-19 had low self-response rates in the Census. Queens is tremendously proud to be the most ethno-racially diverse county in the continental United States, but when it comes to the Census, our exceptional diversity presents unique challenges. In this political climate, even after the federal government’s failed attempt to add a citizenship question to the Census questionnaire, our undocumented immigrants and mixed-status families were reluctant to be counted. Also, our African American communities in Southeast Queens and the Rockaways have historically been undercounted, and response rates were persistently low.

Yet, Queens was determined to secure its fair share of federal funding through the 2020 Census. Already in November of 2018, my predecessor, the Honorable Melinda Katz, announced the formation of the Queens Complete Count Committee, a diverse and vibrant network of trusted community partners committed to ensuring that their neighborhoods would be counted. My office has fully sustained this commitment.

Since February of 2019, the Queens CCC has met on a regular basis, strategizing across neighborhood and cultural lines. We have benefited from the expertise of many great colleagues at NYC Census 2020, the US Census Bureau, the Population Division at City Planning, ABNY, and Queens Public Library. Our trusted community partners have been incredibly resilient: When the pandemic hit, they moved their Census outreach to virtual platforms. Our office partnered with NYC Census 2020 on a weekly phone bank that contacted over 40,000 Queens households. When socially-distanced, in-person activity became permissible again, my team joined with our Census colleagues and distributed thousands of branded masks and hand sanitizers while providing questionnaire assistance at food distribution sites and transit hubs. Funding from the City Council, the Mayor’s office, the Governor’s office, and the Borough President’s office has been essential in helping our community partners to launch their own rigorous Get Out the Count campaigns.

All of these efforts have paid off. Whereas Queens ranked #4 among the five boroughs for approximately a year, we are now virtually tied for second place with Manhattan. As of this week, our self-response rate is 62.3%, which is above the city average of 61.4%.

The federal government's decision to bring this critically important process to a screeching halt is devastating to our borough and city. Thousands of Queens residents will lose their chance to self-respond. But rest assured that our borough-level operation will continue until the very last moment, when the Census portal closes. Thank you for your support.