National Association of Latino Elected Officials

Testimony Submitted by Tracy Nájera, PhD, Executive Director of Children’s Defense Fund-Ohio

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Thank you for inviting me to testify this morning on the matter of the 2020 Census & the child undercount. My name is Tracy Nájera and I’m the Executive Director of Children’s Defense Fund-Ohio. Thank you to the National Association of Latino Elected Officials for hosting this important hearing on the 2020 Census. I want to begin by saying that I’m encouraged and thank our leaders in Franklin County, especially Commissioner Kevin Boyce and the City of Columbus, Mayor Andrew Ginther for their leadership in standing up a broad based coalition representing the diverse facets of our community here in Central Ohio to make sure that everyone counts.

I want to share a little bit about who I represent: CDF provides a strong, effective and independent voice for all children who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor children, children of color and those with disabilities. We educate our policymakers and community members about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before they get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble or suffer family breakdown.

I am also here on behalf of the Ohio Census Advocacy, a group of over 30 nonprofit organizations (and growing) from throughout Ohio representing community action, direct service, policy and advocacy organizations reaching every segment and region of our state. Formed in mid-2018, we have worked collaboratively throughout the state to encourage localities to stand up complete count committees, working with policymakers for state and federal funding to support awareness building, communications and get out the count efforts for next year, and serving as a voice against actions that would suppress a complete count in Ohio and in other states of our new immigrants, new Americans, and other hard to count populations.

For nearly two years, CDF-Ohio has been building awareness around the state about the upcoming census. We recognize as a child advocacy organization, that many of our neighborhoods and communities throughout the state of Ohio – especially our Latino, African-American, New American, Immigrant communities – are at particular risk of not being engaged to participate in this critical decennial count. This is a very concerning issue – especially in light of the report, Our Pathways to a Brighter Future: Ohio’s New Americans (<https://www.olaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Ohio-Immigrants-Report-FINAL-1.pdf>) , which states that, “…While Ohio’s population growth is almost stagnant, growing at only 0.15 percent since 1998, immigrants help to stabilize Ohio’s population and are a source of growth.”

This is so critical in that a clear and accurate census data is the life blood of a strong nation and a strong Ohio.

An undercount would be devastating for Ohio, in that we are at risk of losing political influence. At one time – 40 years ago – Ohio had 24 congressional seats. After the 2010 count, we lost two congressional seats and are down to 16 seats. In this upcoming census we are poised to lose at least 1 – maybe 2 seats.

Furthermore, $33 billion in federal funding is distributed in Ohio based on the Census and nearly $600 billion throughout the country for critical programs like Medicaid, the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP), and Head Start.

Challenges

There are three issues that we face as a nation and as a state that I’ll speak about briefly: 1) HTC Children 2) Online census 3) Citizenship question.

**Hard to Count Populations – Children.** Unfortunately, more than 100,000 of Ohio’s children are already at risk of being undercounted because they live in an area that the Census Bureau considers “hard-to-count”— and that’s just children ages 0-4. The 2010 Census undercounted more than one million children, with Black and Latino children being missed twice as often as White children. Many of these children live in Ohio’s urban centers, in high density rental properties, and in our rural areas. *We need to make sure all children count.*

**Online Census.** The U.S. Census Bureau identified less expensive approaches to conducting the 2020 Census via online methods. However, an online census represents challenges, like the lack of high-speed internet and broadband in rural areas. Approximately one-third of Ohio’s population in rural areas lack access to high-speed internet service compared to 2 percent of the populations in Ohio’s urban areas.

**Citizenship Question: Stoking Fear in Immigrant Families and Neighborhoods.** The citizenship question will compromise the U.S. Census Bureau’s ability to complete an accurate count of every person living in the United States, placing all communities at risk of being underrepresented and under-resourced. Studies have shown that inclusion of this question threatens to undercount our immigrant residents regardless of their legal status. The citizen question is problematic to Ohio specifically because our state’s population growth and stability, in large part, is fueled by our immigrant population who contribute significantly to our economy and the vitality of our neighborhoods and communities.

I’ll provide a short update on this item: Nearly two weeks ago, Judge Richard Seeborg in San Francisco said the commerce secretary, Wilbur Ross’, decision to add the question was arbitrary and capricious and would violate a constitutional requirement that the census accurately count the U.S. population.

According to his ruling, “The record in this case has clearly established that including the citizenship question on the 2020 census is fundamentally counterproductive to the goal of obtaining accurate citizenship data about the public,” Seeborg said.

Including an untested, controversial citizenship question on the 2020Census will undermine the quality and accuracy of the census in every community. Further we believe that there is grave risk of a significant undercount, especially among hard-to-reach population groups that are already fearful of answering government surveys. As a result, Children’s Defense Fund-Ohio and our partners are supportive of two pieces of federal legislation that would ensure that an accurate census, adhering to the constitutional requirements and address our concerns:

1. Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) introduced legislation to prohibit the Census Bureau from including questions on citizenship, nationality, or immigration status on the decennial census.  The rationale being that the American Community Survey, which is regularly given to a rotating sampling of households, already asks questions about citizenship status.  Further – she argues that inclusion of an untested question on citizenship status, the Census Bureau risks reducing response rates and threatens to underemphasize minority communities.
2. Rep. Maloney (D-NY) Census IDEA Act mandates a three-year review process for each question proposed to the decennial census. This would prohibit the Trump Administration’s planned citizenship question and ensure that all lines of inquiry undergo proper vetting and testing before being added to the 2020 Census.

**We also face challenges here at home**

Ohio’s census efforts are run through the Ohio Development Services Agency and as of my testimony this morning, Governor DeWine has not yet issued an Executive Order creating the state’s Complete Count Commission. Further, the Governor’s introduced budget was released this past Friday and we do not yet have clarity of whether the funds were appropriated to ramp up awareness building, communications, planning, and mobilization efforts. It is also fair to state that based on my understanding, in the past there has been no allocated budget for Ohio’s CCC or other census efforts; the state relied entirely on allocations from the federal government.

**Representing a child advocacy organization, I will focus my comments specifically on the risk of an undercount for children.**

Young children are undercounted in the census at a higher rate than any other age group. Young children – defined as children under age five – have been undercounted for decades, disadvantaging their families, communities, and neighborhoods.

In the 2010 Census, the net undercount rate for young children was 4.6 percent, and more than 2.2 million in this age group were not included in the census results. This is a higher net undercount rate than for any other age group. Even among other children, those under five years old are more likely to be missing from census data.

Some groups of young children, depending on their race, ethnicity, or even where they live, have higher-than-average undercounts. Young Black and Hispanic children have the highest net undercounts. Experts estimate that approximately 6.5 percent of young Black and Hispanic children were overlooked by the 2010 Census, roughly twice the rate for young non-Hispanic White children.

Nationally, almost 4.5 million children under age five live in hard-to-count neighborhoods.

Ohio has the 10th highest number of young children living in hard-to-count census tracts 106,217 (15%) of Ohio’s young children live in hard-to-count census tracts:

* 73% of Cleveland’s young children are at risk
* 52% of Columbus’s young children are at risk
* 46% of Cincinnati’s young children are at risk
* 38% of Toledo’s young children are at risk

Why are young children missed so often in the census? Many young children live in households, families, and neighborhoods that are most difficult to count.

* It is widely believed that poor households are difficult to enumerate, and young children have a higher poverty rate than any age group. This national finding is especially true in Ohio, where children are the poorest segment of our population with 1 in 5 children under the age of 18 living in poverty. We may want to remember though that the youngest of our children are typically the poorest – one indicator of this is that over half of births in our state are paid for by Medicaid.
* Nationally, we find that young children in large families may go uncounted because they live in large and complex households. In 2010, nearly a quarter of young children lived in households of six or more people. A recent study found 40 percent of all children under age five lived in a household with complex living arrangements.
  + To define complex living arrangements - Some young children move among various relatives or caregivers during the week, month or year. For example, this would include foster children, children living with grandparents or other relatives formally or informally, and children whose parents are cohabiting but not married are also more likely to be missed.
* In Ohio, which has been at the nation’s epicenter of the opioid crisis, we have many children living in foster care and in informal housing arrangements with grandparents and other relatives.
* Young children in complex households may be left off the questionnaires because respondents are uncertain of whether or not to include a young child as a household resident.

I want circle back to the issue of citizenship questions: Ohio and central Ohio in particular, has a growing immigrant population representing many different cultures, ethnicities and languages. I will focus on our Latino community for a moment.

* According to Ohio’s Development Services Agency, Ohio’s Latino community is comprised of nearly 437,000 people, accounting for 3.7 percent of the state’s total population. The 2017 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, reported that Ohio’s Latino population doubled since 2000 and has more than tripled since 1980 – with Cuyahoga and Franklin Counties having the largest Latino populations. Of course that number is probably much higher in post-hurricane Maria era and the Puerto Rican diaspora that followed.
* Language barriers also contribute to the undercount of young children in households where people speak a language other than English. In 2010, one-quarter of young Latino children lived in a linguistically isolated household where adults had difficulty speaking English. It is shown that language limitations cause respondents to report in error on the census questionnaire. The Census bureau will provide language accommodations in the 12 most common non-English languages and support in another 59 languages.

Efforts to suppress counts of certain segments of our communities – especially our youngest and fastest growing segments - is denying their voice. The bottom line is when young children are undercounted, their communities are denied a full voice in policy decision making. Children are included in the population totals used for congressional reapportionment and the drawing of legislative district boundaries. The Latino voice in Ohio is a growing one and we need to make sure that as part of our hard to count communities they are intentionally engaged and part of the effort to make sure that all Ohioans count.

Opportunities

Ohio has an opportunity to ensure that all its residents are counted, not only to ensure appropriate political representation, but to direct much needed resources to our neighborhoods and communities. By learning from Ohio’s past efforts, both successes and missteps, and from other states, we can get ready for the 2020 Census by allocating resources now, so all procedures and efforts are in place when the count begins in April 2020.

Recommendations

In our work, CDF-Ohio and the Ohio Census Advocacy Coalition are proposing the following policy actions:

We need to establish Complete Count Commission at the state level and in as many local governments as possible. The members making up these groups must represent our communities – especially our hard-to-count populations and those who provide direct services to our communities.

* We must advocate to make sure that sufficient outreach is conducted. The DeWine budget does not explicitly include an appropriation for census support. We are hopeful that the legislation will include language setting aside the recommended $2.5 million in funding for these critical efforts in communications and outreach to areas of the state most at risk for being missed.
* We need to treat this effort similarly to a get out the vote campaign – using modern methods of communications and tapping credible messengers within our communities to be ambassadors for the census. Think geo-targeting, leveraging our libraries as census completion stations, and identifying and equipping trusted messengers who interact with our caregivers and parents - like our teachers, child care providers, and medical professionals, so they can encourage them to make sure their children and the children living in their home are counted.

* We must also identify and mobilize community partners and assets to ensure that vulnerable populations have the ability to participate in the 2020 Census via paper, mobile, or online forms and in their native language.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony and I welcome any questions you may have.

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The Children’s Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.