



City of Seattle
Mayor Jenny A. Durkan

August 7, 2018

Jennifer Jessup
Departmental Paperwork Clearance Office
Department of Commerce
Room 6616
14th and Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

RE: Comments on Proposed Information Collection on 2020 Census,

Dear Ms. Jessup:

On behalf of the Census Task Force of the City of Seattle, we write to submit comments regarding the 2020 Census proposed information collection and to urge the Department of Commerce to remove the citizenship question from the 2020 Census form, as it will jeopardize the accuracy of the census.

We believe in a full, fair, and accurate census, and the collection of useful, objective data. The census is integral to our democracy, ensuring that district lines and political power are fairly drawn and allocated. The Census began in 1790 as an attempt to capture the true makeup of the nation's population. That first census, by design, counted *everyone* living in the nation.

An accurate count is vital to our city's wellbeing. The federal government uses census-derived data to direct at least \$800 billion annually in federal assistance to states, localities, and families. This data also guides important community decisions affecting schools, housing, health care services, business investment, and much more. In 2015, Washington State received approximately \$13.7 billion dollars from federal assistance programs based on decennial census data. As an annual allocation, that amounts to approximately \$1,900 per person in Seattle for housing, education, health care, infrastructure, transportation projects and several other federally funded programs. It should be noted that non-citizens pay federal taxes – as of 2015, an estimated \$23.6 billion of the money in our federal treasury came from the very people that may be undercounted.

Simply put, a fair and accurate census is essential for all basic functions of our society. The inclusion of a question on citizenship in the 2020 Census undermines our city's and our country's ability to fully serve its population's needs. Further, a citizenship question discounts the contributions of all our country's residents, including undocumented residents, legal permanent residents, and citizens.

Already we have heard distrust and concern about the census. Many do not trust the government's purpose for seeking information or how that information will be used. This is true for many citizens and legal residents. Inclusion of a citizenship question by the Department of Commerce will hinder the

agency's ability to collect accurate census data by creating a chilling effect on participation for all communities, including citizens, non-citizens, communities of color, immigrants, refugees, urban, and rural communities—an outcome that the nation will have to live with for the next 10 years. Even before Secretary Ross' decision to place a citizenship question on the 2020 Census, state and local officials and community leaders were deeply concerned about the difficulty of achieving robust participation in many hard-to-count communities, especially in immigrant communities and communities of color, which are the heart of our diverse city and region.

Including the citizenship question on the Census questionnaire is a purposeful tool to both suppress accurate count and target our immigrant communities. It would force them to make the choice between not submitting a form at all or submitting a form with the citizenship question blank. Both options would result in an in-person follow up by the Census Bureau and would thus open these communities up for potential other actions.

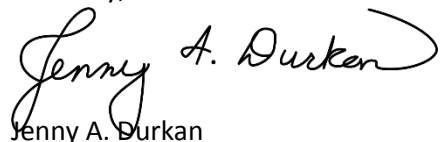
In Seattle, immigrants account for an estimated 16.9% of our population. Moreover, an estimated 21.3% of our populations speak a language other than English at home, and 129 languages are spoken in our public schools. Between 2000 and 2014, Seattle's immigrant population grew 20% compared to 14% for the overall population. These residents are part of the economic, cultural, and civic fabric of our city, and it is essential that these populations are accurately counted in the Census.

Already, 20% of residents in Seattle did not fill out their Census form in 2010, triggering an in-person visit from Census Bureau staff. Including the citizenship question on the survey could significantly increase that number, adding to costs and diminishing accuracy. It is essential that the Census remain fair and open, which means refraining from placing undue burdens on our immigrant residents or residents from our communities of color.

Unsurprisingly, the request to include the citizenship question has drawn intense opposition from a nonpartisan and ideologically broad group of business leaders, state and local officials, social scientists, and civil and human rights advocates who know how much is at stake with a fair and accurate census. This groundswell of opposition has included more than 160 Republican and Democratic mayors, six former directors of the Census Bureau, two former Commerce Secretaries from Republican and Democratic administrations, 171 civil and human rights groups, more than 600 faith leaders, more than 120 members of the U.S. House of Representatives, and many others representing a diversity of political ideologies and communities. **All are united in their deep-seated concern that an untested citizenship question will compromise implementation of the 2020 Census and jeopardize the quality and accuracy of census data for all communities.**

A full, fair, and accurate census is critical. For the reasons discussed above, we strongly oppose asking about citizenship status in the 2020 Census and urge the Department of Commerce to remove the proposed citizenship question from the data collection forms.

Sincerely,



Jenny A. Durkan
Mayor of Seattle

Seattle Census Task Force
City of Seattle