March 26, 2020

Dr. Steven Dillingham, Ph.D
Director
United States Census Bureau
Washington, DC 20233

Dear Dr. Dillingham:

Given the unprecedented events associated with the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, we urge you to extend the Census response deadline beyond its currently scheduled conclusion on August 14, 2020 to September 30, 2020 and authorize United States Census Regional Offices to exercise flexibility in the timeline for enumeration in their respective jurisdictions. As our cities continue to dedicate resources to respond to this outbreak and take strong precautionary measures to ensure social distancing, there will be diminished capacity to administer the Census. A Census count under these circumstances would not only fail to properly account for our current population, particularly our most vulnerable residents, but could also have dire consequences for our communities’ public health.

Over the past two years, our cities have worked with thousands of community-based and faith-based organizations to develop a wide array of targeted outreach strategies to educate and motivate residents to respond to the 2020 Census. These outreach strategies heavily rely on direct, face-to-face communication and interaction with residents to encourage participation in the Census and overcome barriers to participation that cause many communities to be historically undercounted.

With the mandated cessation of all large gatherings and the imposition of social distancing practices, our cities and partners have had to cancel meetings, workshops, community and neighborhood events, as well as a variety of door-to-door canvassing operations. We know that none of these tried and true outreach methods are possible in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that any Census count that occurs without this outreach will cause an historic and extremely damaging undercount. If the Census Count is rightly delayed, we will be able to fully activate our network to connect with our community, in particular our historically undercounted communities.

Although many cities also hoped that the Census Bureau’s increased emphasis on online submissions would facilitate an elevated self-response rate and help capture historically undercounted communities, we are deeply concerned that large swaths of our communities do not have access to the internet at home. According to the Pew Research Center, racial minorities, older adults, rural residents, and those with lower levels of education and income are less likely to have broadband service at home. Roughly three-in-ten adults with annual household incomes below $30,000 (29%) don’t own a smartphone. More than four-in-ten don’t have home broadband services (44%) or a traditional computer (46%). These individuals would need access to one of the Census Bureau’s outreach sites that provide the public with an opportunity to access the Internet.

If local businesses and libraries are closed, it is inconceivable to assume the Census will meet its online reporting targets necessary to achieve their targeted response rate. Technology access was one of the biggest barriers to ensuring a complete Census count. During the COVID-19 pandemic, that barrier has become the only safe outreach method available. We know that we must have more than digital outreach tools available to conduct a complete, safe, and accurate Census count.
As you know, the vital importance of an accurate Census count cannot be overstated. Not only is the Census central to apportioning political power, but the data also influences the allocation of billions of dollars every year for services that our residents rely on, including like schools, fire departments, and hospitals. As mayors of cities across America, we have an enormous stake in ensuring the accuracy of the Census count. We are not asking for a delay of the deadline getting the Census information to the President; but urge you to extend the Census deadline to September 30.

Sincerely,

Jenny A. Durkan
Mayor
Seattle, Washington

Sam Liccardo
Mayor
San Jose, California

Bill de Blasio
Mayor
New York City, New York

Lori Lightfoot
Mayor
Chicago, Illinois

London N. Breed
Mayor
San Francisco, California

Martin J. Walsh
Mayor
Boston, Massachusetts

Keisha Lance Bottoms
Mayor
Atlanta, Georgia

Mike Coffman
Mayor
Aurora, Colorado

Kate Gallego
Mayor
Phoenix, AZ

Libby Schaaf
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Oakland, California

John Giles
Mayor
Mesa, Arizona

Miguel Pulido
Mayor
Santa Ana, California

Lily Mei
Mayor
Fremont, California

Cassie Franklin
Mayor
Everett, Washington

Darrell Steinberg
Mayor
Sacramento, California

Christopher Cabaldon
Mayor
West Sacramento, California

Harry Sidhu
Mayor
Anaheim, California

Lyda Krewson
Mayor
St. Louis, Missouri
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