



May 8, 2018

The Honorable Trey Gowdy  
The Honorable Elijah Cummings  
House Oversight and Government Reform Committee

RE: Census Oversight hearing

Dear Chairman Gowdy and Ranking Member Cummings,

Thank you for convening today's hearing for a progress report on preparations for the 2020 Census. On behalf of the Insights Association,<sup>1</sup> I urge you to pay special attention today to (1) how the Census Bureau will ensure an accurate count in rural and remote areas of the country; and (2) why they are adding a citizenship question and what its potential impact on the headcount (and budget) will be.

### **Counting in Rural and Remote Areas**

Capturing the hard-to-count populations is the toughest (and most expensive) part of the decennial Census, and rural areas are surprisingly hard to count. A recent study found that most people living in hard-to-count counties (71 percent) are in urban areas, but most of the hard-to-count counties (79 percent) are in rural areas.<sup>2</sup>

Due to funding shortfalls, the Census Bureau had to cancel 2017 field tests of special counting procedures for tribal lands and rural and remote areas in the Dakotas, Washington state and Puerto Rico. Members of the Committee may also be following the end-to-end readiness test currently underway in Providence, Rhode Island, but may not realize that this essential testing is only a fraction of what was originally planned. The end-to-end readiness testing that was also supposed to include rural and remote areas in West Virginia was similarly axed due to lack of funds.

According to the study, rural residents, especially in Appalachia,<sup>3</sup> "are less likely than urban residents to live in areas that will be the most difficult to enumerate in the 2020 Census, but some groups and some places in rural America will nevertheless be very difficult to enumerate accurately. Special attention is needed for specific

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<sup>1</sup> The Insights Association was formed through the merger of two trade organizations with long, respected histories of servicing the market research and analytics industry: the Marketing Research Association (MRA), founded in 1957, and the Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO), founded in 1975. Representing more than 4,000 members across the United States, the Insights Association is the leading nonprofit trade association for the market research and analytics industry, and the leader in establishing industry best practices and enforcing professional standards. The Insights Association's membership includes both research and analytics companies and organizations, as well as the researchers and research departments inside of non-research companies and organizations.

<sup>2</sup> "2020 Census Faces Challenges in Rural America." by William O'Hare. Carsey Research National Issue Brief #131. Winter 2017 <https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1329&context=carsey>

<sup>3</sup> Appalachia, approximately 420 counties from New York to Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, has 34 percent of its population living in "nonmetro counties, twice the national level." It is also one of the historically poorer regions of the U.S. According to the report, "the most remote rural areas of Appalachia... have a higher percentage of their population living in HTC areas than any other type of area in Appalachia. In West Virginia, which is entirely in the Appalachian region, nearly one-quarter of the population lives in HTC census tracts, a higher share than any other part of Appalachia and higher than the national average."

populations and places, like: Blacks in the rural South; Hispanics in the rural Southwest; American Indians on reservations; Alaska Natives; Residents of deep Appalachia; Migrant and seasonal farmworkers.”

Helping trusted state and local messengers promote participation in hard-to-count communities is key to increasing self-response and reducing the scale of more expensive door-to-door follow-up visits in the 2020 Census. (The 2010 Census' cost rose \$90 million for every 1% of households that didn't self-respond and required door-to-door visits).

However, the proposed budget for Partnership staff will not accommodate much of this essential outreach, and we encourage you to pursue questions to find out what the Bureau is going to do about it.

### **Adding a citizenship question**

With the proposed addition of a question on citizenship to the decennial Census questionnaire, we urge Committee members to seek more information about why it is necessary to add without testing.

Adding a citizenship question to the decennial census without appropriate testing<sup>4</sup> introduces unknown accuracy risks due to the potential that it will deter legal or illegal immigrants from responding. Without testing and with fewer respondents, the decennial headcount likely will be less accurate, less valuable and unnecessarily expensive.

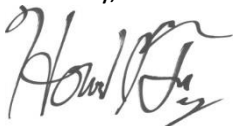
To ensure accuracy, the census requires the highest possible representation of our population. Every subsequent survey and study that intends to be statistically representative of the U.S. population will be built on decennial data, and any inaccuracies will be felt for at least a decade

Marketing researchers know the expense of respondent cooperation better than most, as well as the potential downside of making any survey longer. As we noted above in our concerns about the rural count, the most expensive part of the 2020 Census will be door-to-door non-response follow-up. For the 2010 census, it cost \$90 million more for every 1 percent of households that didn't respond up front. The budgetary impact of adding a citizenship question could be severe and require significant emergency appropriations.

### **Conclusion**

We look forward to working with the Committee to ensure an accurate and inclusive 2020 Census.

Sincerely,



Howard Fienberg  
VP, Advocacy  
Insights Association

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<sup>4</sup> According to the Congressional Research Service, “The 1950 census was the last to date that collected citizenship data from the whole population, rather than a population sample.” After that, the “citizenship and/or related questions” were on the old census “long form” and now on the rolling annual American Community Survey (ACS) that replaced the long form.