



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
U.S. Census Bureau
Office of the Director
Washington, DC 20233-0001

June 16, 2022

The Honorable Richard Durbin
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Durbin:

Thank you for your cosigned letter conveying your concerns about a potential population undercount of the State of Illinois during the 2020 Census. We understand your concern about a potential undercount.

No census is perfect, and results from the Post-Enumeration Survey and Demographic Analysis offer additional insights about the quality of the 2020 Census. According to our estimates, the 2020 Census may have undercounted many of the same population groups we have historically undercounted while overcounting others. Even with the imperfections, the total population count appears robust and consistent with the quality of recent censuses. This is an important finding, reflecting a notable accomplishment amid the unprecedented challenges of 2020.

Our staff, partners, and communities across the nation went to extraordinary lengths to get a complete count. When the pandemic hit, we adapted quickly. We believe those efforts were beneficial. We are committed to transparency and will continue to provide findings on census quality as we develop them. As we do each decade, we are learning from the 2020 Census, and as we plan for the 2030 Census, we will continue to collaborate with stakeholders from diverse perspectives and backgrounds throughout the nation.

Your specific comments are addressed below:

Question 1. How does the Census Bureau plan to incorporate the PES findings into data products that inform federal funding allocations? What is the timeline for doing so?

Post-Enumeration Survey estimates are released to help data users better understand the quality of the census counts, but they will not be used to change the final census counts or any 2020 Census data products.

Ultimately, Congress determines the funding formulas and selects which data to use (and it can adjust those formulas if needed). Congress can and does choose to use other data products. The U.S. Census Bureau has no authority over federal funding allocations.

The Census Bureau produces a host of data products that together inform the allocation of billions of dollars of federal funding. Our subject matter experts work to help our colleagues

in the federal government understand the value and limitations of Census Bureau data products.

That said, the Census Bureau has established a team of experts tasked with researching the feasibility of taking coverage measures from the Demographic Analysis and Post-Enumeration Survey into account in the development of the official population estimates. The team is taking a phased approach to the research, beginning with an analysis of 2020 Census data and coverage measures. This first phase will extend into next year. The timeline for the availability of results and their potential incorporation into the official population estimates is still being determined.

Question 2. Will the Bureau commit to ensuring that all of its federal partners understand any errors that may have occurred during the Decennial Census, including Illinois' estimated undercount, so that they may have full knowledge to inform their funding allocation decisions?

We have assessed the 2020 Census data were fit for the purposes of apportionment and redistricting upon their release and after rigorous quality review protocols, that assessment remains valid. As with previous decennial censuses, the Post-Enumeration Survey informs the strengths and limitations of the 2020 Census and provides a foundation for the Census Bureau's work to improve the next census. It has never been intended to change a decennial census count. Secondly, we believe the census data are fit for a wide range of other purposes—understanding our population, planning for services, making decisions about funding, etc.

The Census Bureau continues our long-standing practice of making our statistical information as transparent as possible. Census Bureau quality guidelines require our statistical products be accompanied by descriptions—or references to descriptions—of the methods and procedures used in their development, as well as other information about the data that may affect its use. This information was made available for the Post-Enumeration Survey page here: <<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/about/coverage-measurement/pes.html>>. We also provided definitions and descriptions of the concepts and methods as well as source and accuracy statements. Finally, we achieve transparency through the wide dissemination of this information. The results were promoted on the Census Bureau website through news releases, blogs, interactive webinars and news conferences, downloadable presentations, our “America Counts: Stories Behind the Number” articles, interactive data visualizations and maps, and data tables.

The Post-Enumeration Survey is just one piece of our data quality efforts. In keeping with the Census Bureau's commitment to transparency, the 2020 Census program set forth to

analyze and resolve data quality issues and share those results with the public. Data quality is multidimensional—it encompasses completeness, accuracy, reliability, reasonableness, validity, and more—and so, approaching an understanding of data quality from multiple angles produces an insightful and holistic picture of data. The holistic picture of data quality for the 2020 Census is broken down at a high level into two major components: ensuring quality and evaluating quality. We have established the 2020 Census Data Quality webpage for a comprehensive look at how we evaluate 2020 Census data and ensure its quality. It is available here: <<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade/2020/planning-management/process/data-quality.html>>.

Question 3. Will the Bureau commit to taking into account the PES projections in its yearly Population Estimates following the Decennial Census? Further, how will the Bureau ensure Illinois does not receive anything less than its fair and full share of federal funding over the next decade?

As stated above, the Census Bureau has no authority over federal funding allocations. Congress determines the funding formulas and selects which data to use (and can adjust those formulas if needed). Congress can and does choose to use other data products.

While too early to commit to incorporating PES into the population estimates, the Census Bureau is researching the feasibility of taking coverage measures from both the Demographic Analysis and Post-Enumeration Survey into account in the development of the official population estimates.

Thank you again for your inquiry and your continued support of the Decennial Census Program. Should you have any questions, please contact Angel Colón-Rivera, Chief, Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs, at 301-763-6100 or cao@census.gov.

Sincerely,



Robert L. Santos
Director

cc: The Honorable Tammy Duckworth
The Honorable Cheri Bustos
The Honorable Sean Casten
The Honorable Danny K. Davis
The Honorable Raja Krishnamoorthi
The Honorable Jan Schakowsky
The Honorable Lauren Underwood
The Honorable Bill Foster
The Honorable Bobby L. Rush
The Honorable Jesús G. "Chuy" Garcia
The Honorable Bradley S. Schneider
The Honorable Mark Newman
The Honorable Mike Quigley
The Honorable Robin L. Kelly