

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051  
MINORITY (202) 225-5074  
<https://oversight.house.gov>

January 13, 2022

The Honorable Robert Santos  
Director  
U.S. Census Bureau  
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Director Santos:

We write to follow up on concerning reports that the population of Detroit may have been significantly undercounted in the 2020 Census, and to seek information on the recourse available to Detroit and other communities that may be at risk of losing critical services and funding because their populations were undercounted.

In December 2021, the University of Michigan released an analysis suggesting that residential units in the city of Detroit may have been undercounted by as much as 8.1%. The study analyzed ten neighborhoods in Detroit and compared 2020 Census responses against other 2020 population data, including from the U.S. Postal Service and a canvas conducted by Wayne State University. Researchers concluded, “these data offer compelling evidence of a likely undercount of Detroit in the 2020 Census.” They warned that if similar undercounts are present across the entire city, it could mean that tens of thousands of Detroit residents were not counted in the Census.<sup>1</sup>

This is not the only alarm raised by Detroit officials and demographers about the possibility of a severe undercount in the city. Comparisons between the Census Bureau’s 2019 population estimates and the 2020 Census count show a single year drop of roughly 31,000 residents, a decline that Professor Jeffery Morenoff, a co-author of the University of Michigan analysis, characterized as “highly anomalous and frankly implausible.”<sup>2</sup> In August 2021, Detroit Mayor Michael Duggan noted that the number of households with active utility services exceeded the number of households enumerated in the 2020 Census, suggesting a severe

---

<sup>1</sup> University of Michigan Poverty Solutions, *Analysis of the Census 2020 Count in Detroit* (Dec. 2020) (online at <http://sites.fordschool.umich.edu/poverty2021/files/2021/12/PovertySolutions-Census-Undercount-in-Detroit-PolicyBrief-December2021.pdf>).

<sup>2</sup> *2020 Census May Have Significantly Undercounted Detroit, Study Finds*, Washington Post (Dec. 17, 2021) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/12/17/2020-census-undercount-detroit/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/12/17/2020-census-undercount-detroit/)).

undercount.<sup>3</sup> Mayor Duggan has filed an appeal of Detroit's count with the Department of Commerce.<sup>4</sup>

The Census Bureau was forced to execute the 2020 Census under extremely challenging conditions, including the coronavirus pandemic that forced the Bureau to cut short the Census timeline and alter procedures.<sup>5</sup> The 2020 Census also suffered from repeated efforts by the Trump Administration to politicize the Census for partisan gain, including failed efforts to add a citizenship question, exclude undocumented immigrants from the count, and speed up data processing to exert more political control over the outcome.<sup>6</sup>

These challenges may have led to significant undercounts of some communities and groups, particularly those that are traditionally hard to count. According to a November 2021 estimate prepared by the Urban Institute, the 2020 Census may have undercounted Black people by 2.45%, Latinos by 2.17%, and households with noncitizens by as much as 3.36%. Children and renters were also estimated to have been significantly undercounted.<sup>7</sup> For some states, including New York, an undercount may have impacted congressional apportionment.<sup>8</sup>

For all these reasons, we are concerned about the potential undercount in Detroit and other communities and the impact it will have on these communities' abilities to provide critical services for underserved populations. To address the Committee's concerns, we request that the Census Bureau provide Committee staff a briefing by January 27, 2021, on the following topics:

1. The process and timeline by which the Census Bureau is analyzing potential undercounts in the 2020 Census, including among underserved populations;
2. The Census Bureau's analysis of the potential undercount in Detroit and any steps being taken to address it; and

---

<sup>3</sup> *The Census Said Detroit Kept Shrinking. The Mayor Begs to Differ.*, New York Times (Aug. 28, 2021) (online at [www.nytimes.com/2021/08/28/us/detroit-census-mike-duggan.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/28/us/detroit-census-mike-duggan.html)).

<sup>4</sup> *Detroit Mayor Says Census Bureau "Intentionally" Undercounted Population of Majority-Black City*, Michigan Live (Dec. 16, 2021) (online at [www.mlive.com/public-interest/2021/12/detroit-mayor-says-census-bureau-intentionally-undercounted-population-of-majority-black-city.html](http://www.mlive.com/public-interest/2021/12/detroit-mayor-says-census-bureau-intentionally-undercounted-population-of-majority-black-city.html)).

<sup>5</sup> *How Trump Officials Cut the 2020 Census Short Amid the Pandemic*, National Public Radio (Sept. 18, 2020) (online at [www.npr.org/2020/09/18/911960963/how-trump-officials-cut-the-2020-census-short-amid-the-pandemic](http://www.npr.org/2020/09/18/911960963/how-trump-officials-cut-the-2020-census-short-amid-the-pandemic)).

<sup>6</sup> *Census Battle Ends as Trump Administration Gives Up on Excluding Undocumented from Apportionment*, Washington Post (Jan. 16, 2021) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/census-battle-ends-as-trump-administration-gives-up-on-excluding-undocumented-from-apportionment/2021/01/16/bd17025c-57ba-11eb-a931-5b162d0d033d\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/census-battle-ends-as-trump-administration-gives-up-on-excluding-undocumented-from-apportionment/2021/01/16/bd17025c-57ba-11eb-a931-5b162d0d033d_story.html)).

<sup>7</sup> Urban Institute, *Simulating the 2020 Census: Miscounts and the Fairness of Outcomes* (Nov. 2, 2021) (online at [www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104961/simulating-the-2020-census\\_2.pdf](http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104961/simulating-the-2020-census_2.pdf)); *The 2020 Census Likely Left Out People of Color at Rates Higher Than a Decade Ago*, National Public Radio (Nov. 2, 2021) (online at [www.npr.org/2021/11/02/1044761456/2020-census-results-by-race-undercount-populations-black-latino-hispanic-urban](http://www.npr.org/2021/11/02/1044761456/2020-census-results-by-race-undercount-populations-black-latino-hispanic-urban)).

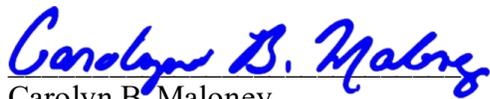
<sup>8</sup> *REPORT: Census Undercount Cost New York a Seat in Congress*, NEWS10 ABC (online at [www.news10.com/news/ny-news/report-census-undercount-cost-new-york-a-congressional-seat/](http://www.news10.com/news/ny-news/report-census-undercount-cost-new-york-a-congressional-seat/)).

3. Any steps communities can take to challenge and amend their population counts when an undercount has occurred.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. In addition, the Committee has jurisdiction over “[p]opulation and demography generally, including the Census.”<sup>9</sup> If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



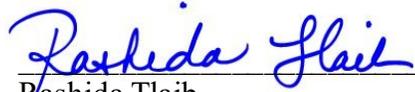
Carolyn B. Maloney  
Chairwoman  
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Jamie Raskin  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and  
Civil Liberties



Brenda Lawrence  
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib  
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Ranking Member  
Committee on Oversight and Reform

The Honorable Nancy Mace, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

---

<sup>9</sup> House rule X, clause 1(n)(8).