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Opening Statement
Rep. Jamie Raskin (MD-08)
Chairman of the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
Hearing on “Providing the Census Bureau with the Time to Produce a Complete and Accurate Census”
September 10, 2020

Good morning, and thank you for joining us today. Thank you, Chairwoman, for holding this hearing and for being such a great champion for the Census.

As the Census Bureau puts it, the mandate of the 2020 Census is to “count everyone once, only once, and in the right place.” While the idea is simple, the execution is anything but. It is difficult in a normal year, but infinitely harder in the middle of a pandemic. Intricate plans and a military-like schedule that are a decade in the making have been upended by the coronavirus crisis, creating an unprecedented challenge for the Bureau.

Despite the herculean effort of an army of enumerators, there is still a shocking amount left to do. As of yesterday, at least 15% of households in 10 states had not yet been counted. Those states include Florida, North Carolina, New Mexico, South Carolina, Louisiana, Arizona, Mississippi, Montana, and Georgia. At the bottom of that list is Alabama, where the Bureau still hasn’t enumerated 20% of households. 20%! That may not seem like much, but if 15-20% of people in all those states aren’t counted, nearly 12.5 million people will be missed.

The threat of an inaccurate count is no more of a “blue state” problem than COVID-19 is a “blue state” problem. Of those 10 states that are at the bottom of the barrel in enumeration, 7 of them have Republicans representing them on this very Committee. 65% of the Congressional seats in those 10 states are held by Republicans, and more than half of those states have all-Republican delegations in the Senate. This is a problem not for the blue states or the red states but the United States.

The Census is only important for two things: money and power. If you don’t care money or power, don’t worry about the Census.

I have the honor to serve on the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis. Many people may not realize how crucial the Census is to our COVID-19 response. The CARES Act, which established the \$150 billion Coronavirus Relief Fund, required the money to be distributed to states based on Census population data. Countless studies tracking the prevalence of COVID-19 in the country have relied on Census tract data, and our fine-grained understanding of the disproportionate impact on communities of color is also based on Census data. The Census is used to determine where to build hospitals. It will help businesses trying to revitalize our

economy determine where to set up shop. And it will help cities determine where to run the bus route or build the road that will help carry workers and consumers to that business.

The Census cannot become a hostage in a political fight. It is foundational to the American constitutional system and representative democracy. It will only grow in importance as we use the data to fight the pandemic and rebuild our devastated economy. This is not the time to rush things. It is time to get it right.

The pandemic has not only made the count itself harder, it has made post-enumeration data integrity even more essential. In a normal year, the Bureau counts everyone as close to April 1 as possible. But this year, the count has been stretched over seven months. That's seven months where people have scattered and moved around the country. College students abandoned their campus dorms. Laid-off workers consolidated households. Medical professionals shuffled around the nation to COVID hot spots. Essential workers quarantined themselves away from vulnerable family members. Loved ones who would have been counted on April 1 sadly succumbed to the disease before their household was enumerated.

The chances seem higher than ever before that some people will be missed, while others will be double counted. This calls for a more robust and elongated post-enumeration data review process. But instead, the Bureau has cut its data processing schedule by 40% from 150 days to around 90 days.

The Bureau knows this is not enough time. We all know it is not enough time. The Bureau has been asking for an extension since April when it first concluded that it could not meet the current statutory redistricting and apportionment deadlines while still delivering the highest quality count.

The House has already agreed to this common-sense plan, but the Heroes Act, which granted the extension that the Administration requested, still is not law. This has left the Bureau scrambling and caused the agency to abandon its carefully crafted data processing schedule for a seat-of-the-pants plan cobbled together in a matter of days.

This is not how an efficient modern government operates; this is what happens in failed states, not functional ones. Every Census expert – including the Bureau itself – agrees that a rushed Census is untenable. I call upon my Republican colleagues to give the Bureau the time it says it needs to do this right. I don't believe anyone here wants their constituents to go uncounted. So, let's make sure that doesn't happen. Let's pass this indispensable and common-sense extension and make sure that we have a full and accurate 2020 Census. We'll have to live with the results for a decade, and if 2020 has taught us anything, it's that lives, our economy, and our democracy depend on getting things right the first time. Let's not hide the truth. Let's recognize it and act accordingly.

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