

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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Opening Statement

Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney

**Full Committee Hearing with Census Bureau Director, Dr. Steven Dillingham
February 12, 2020**

Good morning. Thank you all for being here today. The 2020 Census is now underway. Three weeks ago, the Census Bureau counted its first person in rural Alaska. Next month, counting will begin in earnest around the country.

The Constitution requires us to count every single person in the United States—without exception. This Census will be the largest and most complex in American history, and it is essential that the count is full, fair, and free from interference.

This year's Census will have enormous consequences for our communities. The results will drive the distribution of more than \$1.5 trillion in federal funds—that's Trillion with a T. These funds support critical services like children's healthcare, local schools, roads, and bridges.

Unfortunately, the Trump Administration's preparations for the Census have been woefully inadequate. Whether through incompetence or intentional action, this Administration's failures risk causing grave harm to this year's Census that could jeopardize a complete and accurate count. And these problems are now urgent.

Today, the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office is publicly releasing a troubling new report that highlights serious concerns about preparations for the 2020 Census. We will hear from GAO in a moment, but here are some of the most concerning findings:

- The Census Bureau, quote, “faces significant risks that could adversely impact the cost, quality, schedule, and security of the count.”
- “The Bureau is behind in its goal to recruit more than 2.6 million applicants nationwide for upcoming operations. If the Bureau does not recruit sufficient individuals, it may have difficulty hiring enough staff to complete its upcoming operations within the scheduled timeframes.”
- “The Bureau continues to face challenges related to addressing cybersecurity weaknesses, tracking and resolving cybersecurity recommendations, and addressing numerous other cybersecurity concerns.”

- “The Bureau missed interim milestones for establishing partners. ... [P]artnerships are crucial in educating the public and maximizing survey response rates, particularly for hard-to-count populations.”

Today’s stark warnings from GAO reflect similar concerns that this Committee has been raising for the past several years with increasing urgency. Last month, we held a hearing in which witness after witness raised dire warnings about the Administration’s failures to adequately prepare for the 2020 Census. For example:

- Marc Morial, the President and CEO of the National Urban League, testified that the Census Bureau should be treating this as a, quote, “state of emergency.” He warned that hiring was far behind schedule, that, quote, “it is time to ring the alarm bell,” and that, quote, “the risk for the nation and the risk for our communities is grave.”
- Vanita Gupta, the President and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, testified that an undercount would have, quote, “broad implications” for “how many teachers to students there are in any school district, health care, hospitals, roads, infrastructure.” She warned, quote, “Stakeholders urgently need more information and a deployment plan.”
- Arturo Vargas, the CEO of NALEO Education Fund, warned that the Trump Administration’s citizenship question debacle, quote, “continues to foster fear and doubt,” and that, quote, “this is exacerbated by a hostile environment toward immigrants propagated by this administration.”
- John Yang, the President and CEO of Asian Americans Advancing Justice, testified that the Census Bureau’s language support program has, quote, “severe gaps that need to be overcome” and that hiring efforts have been, quote, “slow and inconsistently inclusive of underserved communities.”

Today, we will hear directly from the Census Bureau Director, and we will have a lot of very tough questions for him. There are grave challenges facing this year’s Census, and to be honest, I don’t have full confidence that the Administration is equipped to handle them.

Nevertheless, we are committed to doing everything we can to highlight these challenges where we see them, work with our dedicated colleagues at the Census Bureau and GAO, and collaborate with our partners across the country to deliver a fair and accurate count. Our Constitution requires it, our communities rely on it, and our democracy depends on it.

Thank you to all our witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to your testimony.

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