



DRUM – DESIS RISING UP & MOVING

72-18 Roosevelt Ave, 2nd Floor, Jackson Heights, NY 11372

Tel. (718) 205-3036 | Fax (718) 205-3037 | info@drumnyc.org | www.drumnyc.org

May 28th, 2019

TESTIMONY FROM DRUM FOR “GETTING COUNTED”

Honorable Representatives,

My name is Kazi Fouzia, and I am the Organizing Director at DRUM- Desis Rising Up & Moving. DRUM is a 19-year old civil rights organization of nearly 4,000 low-income South Asians and Indo-Caribbeans fighting for our rights as immigrants, youth, workers, and as communities of color. Our members live in all parts of Queens, in the Parkchester area of the Bronx, and in Kensington in Brooklyn. Our members are low-income people; they are the cab drivers, street vendors, restaurant workers, retail workers, domestic workers, and their children, who make this city run.

The 2020 Census, the questions that it asks, and the method in which it is rolled out will have immense impact not only for our communities, but also for city, our state, and fundamentally our society and our democracy.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

Before I go into the details of my testimony, I want to highlight our current context. We have an administration that has openly expressed anti-immigrant views. High ranking members of the administration have expressed or have links to forces that want to get rid of or marginalize immigrants from our country. All of this is evidenced in statements from the administration, as well as regressive policies being implemented every day.

The impacts of these statement and policies are very real.

DRUM CONTEXT & COMMUNITY FEAR

Over the last 9 months, we have engaged over 5000 people in person about the 2020 Census, the Citizenship Question, the safety and misuse of personal data, and the impacts on funding and representation. We have held public education workshops in public squares and at community events, and I want you to know that the fear is very very high. Not only among those that are immigrants, but also among those who are citizens. Citizens are worried whether their non-citizen family members would be at risk. But they are also worried that their data will be misused to target them and their communities.

This fear is not unfounded.

MISUSE OF DATA & SECURITY NEEDED

We already know the about the turning over of data related to the Japanese internments in the aftermath of World War 2. But those references presume that was the last time data was misused,

and that there are now protections in place. But in the aftermath of 9/11, Census data about Arab communities, down to the zipcodes, was also turned over to US Customs Service in 2002 and the CBP in 2003.

We need critical steps taken to ensure that data, of individuals, or in the aggregate, will be secured. This also includes the elimination of questions related to citizenship or immigration on the Census.

What steps will you take ensure protection of data?

What steps will be taken to communicate that security to concerned communities?

OUTREACH NEEDED

We have years of outreach experience. In this case, we have 9 months of outreach experience specific to the Census, as well as experience from the previous Census. We need on the ground people, with expertise in our communities to be able to effectively address the questions and concerns that so many people have. This cannot be done by just printing ads in media, or making simple announcements; people need to be engaged, and that requires familiarity, expertise, time, and all of that requires resources.

If we do not commit resources, it will lead to severe undercounting with Material and Political impacts.

MATERIAL IMPACTS

We know that Census data is used to determine funding for almost all of our basic needs. From basic infrastructure, to public benefits, to schools and education, to transit, to hospitals and health. This part of Queens has the most overcrowded schools in the City and the country. Elmhurst Hospital and Jamaica Hospital are also amongst the most overcrowded and underresourced in the city. The impact of undercounting cannot be understated, and the impact will be borne by our society as a whole. We have seen how the measles outbreak didn't just impact people who chose not to vaccinate their children. We live in communities. Impacts on one of us, impact all of us.

POLITICAL IMPACTS

New York state stands to lose 1 to 2 Congressional seats as a result of undercounting. That means that this is an issue of democracy. The questions related to Citizenship and immigration, and the lack of resources for substantive outreach efforts directly undermine our democracy.

I wish I had more time to share our experiences, and the content of our conversations with community members with you. But I want you to know that this issue is critical. And how we prepare for and implement Census 2020 will have long lasting impacts for our communities, our society, and our democracy.

Testimony presented by:

Kazi Fouzia

Organizing Director

DRUM – Desis Rising Up & Moving