



**TESTIMONY FROM THE ASSOCIATION FOR A BETTER NEW YORK BEFORE THE
HOUSE OVERSIGHT AND REFORM COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES**

MAY 28TH, 2019

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Melva Miller and I am the Executive Vice President at the Association for A Better New York, a business and civic organization that for nearly 50 years has advocated for policies and initiatives that make New York a better place to live, work, and visit. On behalf of our members of employers, health, unions, nonprofit, educational, and cultural institutions, I am here to represent our deep commitment to obtaining an accurate Census Count in 2020.

The Census plays a massive role in determining the federal funds New York receives for Medicare, Medicaid, and federal programs that fund housing, infrastructure, and other vital services delivered to most vulnerable members of society. The more than \$73 Billion that New York currently receives in federal funds is at stake in 2020.

In 2010, only 63% of New Yorkers completed the Census. This percentage stands to decrease further in 2020 for a combination of reasons. Firstly, the federal government has made drastic cuts to the number of census offices and outreach employees. Additionally, the Census Bureau has elected to move to an online form. While in many ways this is a step forward, we must remember that 18% of New York households have either no internet subscriptions or dial up-only access and recognize the technological literacy barrier created with this change. Finally, if the proposed citizenship question remains on the form, difficult to reach immigrant populations will be even more reluctant to complete the Census in addition to the many New Yorkers who historically have been difficult to engage in the Census process. All of these factors lead us to believe that securing an accurate Census count in 2020 will be even more difficult than in years prior, and therefore requires real investment.

Here in New York City, we recognize that the challenges we face in 2020 requires a series of coordinated efforts not seen in years past - an all hands-on deck response. To that end, there has been some clear leadership that has emerged to ensure the highest possible participation rate and can serve as a model for other cities. I'd like to paint a picture of what is happening already, and what is still needed for a fair and accurate count in 2020.

From the City of New York, City Hall has participated in the lawsuit opposing the Citizenship question; hired a Census Director to lead a Citywide effort; is in the process of hiring a full Census staff; and is rolling out an outreach plan to tackle the hardest to count communities in New York City. City Council Speaker Cory Johnson created the Census 2020 Task Force Co-Chaired by Councilmembers Carlos Menchaca and Carlina Rivera, and many councilmembers across the City have incorporated Census 2020 focused projects in their Participatory Budgeting Process. In addition, all five Borough Presidents have either already formed boroughwide Census

Complete Count Committees or will form one in the upcoming weeks. All along the way, members of our New York Congressional Delegation have been by our side advocating and educating in the districts, as well in DC, about the importance of the 2020 Census.

Philanthropy has taken a leadership role not only in the first of funders to distribute grants to community-based organizations for outreach, but have led in Census research, education, information sharing, and the Citizen question. On the national level, the Census Funder's Initiative raised over \$70 Million dollars for "Get Out The Count" campaigns. And on the local level there have been clear leaders like New York Community Trust that administers the New York Census Equity Fund, working with individual, national, and local philanthropies like the Ford Foundation, Philanthropy New York, Engage New York, and the Revson Foundation.

And then there is New York Counts 2020 - a statewide coalition of diverse groups working in partnership with government to ensure that New Yorkers - particularly marginalized communities in hard-to-count districts - can fully maximize their participation in the 2020 Census. Groups that are diving into the ethnic and racial implications of the 2020 census like, NALEO and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund on the national level, and here in New York City, The Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College, LatioJustice PRLDEF, and the Asian American Federation, are the boots on the ground doing the work. New York Counts 2020 has over 200 members and has been leading public advocacy on areas like data and cyber security, training, communications, tech, advocacy and outreach and organizing.

And then there is ABNY, the Association for a Better New York. We entered the effort, for one reason, to support the work of all previously mentioned. We formed an organizing and action committee comprised of corporate, non-profit, community and union leaders to simply achieve three goals: 1) maximize the census self-response rate in 2020; 2) help New Yorkers complete the census form; and 3) work to ensure the confidentiality and privacy protections under Title 13 of the United States Code while exploring local protections that can augment federal laws. The ABNY Census 2020 work is based on the understanding that our role is to support and supplement census efforts underway by the US Census Bureau, the State of New York and City of New York, informed by the advocacy and organizing work of New York Counts 2020, and in coordination will all Census 2020 stakeholders.

We see three unique areas of opportunity for ABNY to use community engagement, consensus building, and stakeholder involvement as mechanisms to 1:) Provide a coordinated census effort for New York City; 2:) Organize, facilitate, and support a census campaign for non-traditional census actors, and 3:) Provide support and resources to community-based, non-profit organizations. A coordinated Census 2020 effort for NYC is essential to maximize resources and access to the most up to date and accurate information and include activities like working together to understand the gaps and resources of the effort; working from one census operational timeline to ensure we are hitting important benchmarks and doing the work necessary reach those milestones; making sure we are all mobilizing our external networks for the cause, and simply meeting regularly to share information and best practices.

The second unique opportunity is maximizing the participation non-traditional sectors like Labor, Healthcare, and the Business community. Many segments of the population have been more difficult to count including young children, urban areas, immigrants and communities of

color, and these sectors have a unique ability to reach these hard-to-count individuals and efficiently communicate with those who are hesitant to respond. Members of New York's strongest unions represent our most vulnerable communities; businesses that interact with these populations as employees and customers possess untapped resources; and healthcare institutions are located in communities where we need to reach our most vulnerable populations.

And why should these sectors care? The business sector uses census data to make decisions about what products to make, who to make them for, where to make them, and how to sell them. These strategic and operational decisions are based on the highest quality of data, and billions of dollars and thousands of jobs are at stake. Now more than ever, businesses must reflect a changing America and require the best possible data to make those decisions.

An inclusive census count is important for organized labor because historically union membership has been comprised of the most marginalized members in our society, the same individuals who are at risk of losing funding and political power if undercounted. Participating in the 2020 Census provides a vehicle for coordinating and nurturing cooperative efforts between organized labor and the communities where members live. Labor can help get a complete count in 2020 by leveraging relationships with diverse partners and commit to ensuring members and their families participate and activate for an accurate census.

And how does a fair and accurate census benefit the health care sector? Health care providers, health insurance companies, government agencies, and beneficiaries need accurate information to make decisions regarding health-related products and services they provide and utilize. An inaccurate measure of the U.S. population and its characteristics could deprive the health care sector of vital resources needed to ensure it is meeting each community's needs. In addition, hospitals and medical facilities that service our most vulnerable populations rely on hundreds of billions of dollars in federal funding for health care programs. These include Medicaid, Medicare Part B, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Health Centers Program, and Reproductive Health Programs.

The last area of support, which is the most important opportunity, is the Community-based, not-for-profit network here in New York City. We believe there needs to be a significant investment to support Community-based organizations to help New York obtain an accurate 2020 Census count. This expenditure of about \$2 per New Yorker is an extremely wise investment, as New York stands to lose approximately \$3,000 for every undercounted individual. It is crucial that funding is allocated to Community Based Organizations, who are already embedded in the communities we need to reach. We will not obtain an accurate count in 2020 from only a universal messaging campaign. It is vital that we have culturally-competent messaging, and that this information comes from trusted messengers. Community Based Organizations are these trusted messengers and already have the infrastructure for success. They speak the right languages, know the stakeholders, and have already earned the confidence of many hard to count individuals in New York City. CBO's are the only organizations that will be able to effectively communicate with individuals that government and businesses have historically struggled to reach.

So why is New York City attempting to engage in such a robust Census 2020 plan? We know that in order to get the most comprehensive census count in 2020, we need resources far and beyond what the Census Bureau has committed to provide. New York City is a unique place with unique challenges. We know that every New Yorker counts and that every New Yorker deserves to be counted.

Thank you for your time.