

**Testimony
Of
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**Information Policy, Census, and National Archives Subcommittee
Oversight and Government Reform Committee**

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2:00 p.m.**

***“The 2010 Census Communication Contract: The Media Plan in Hard to
Count Areas”***

Thank you for the opportunity to share the perspective of Arab Americans as you explore the issues affecting communities that will be hard to count in the 2010 Census. I will direct my testimony in four segments: (1) a brief background on my community’s involvement with the U.S. Census; (2) the factors that may shape Arab American participation in the upcoming Census; (3) our observations of the communications campaign undertaken by the U.S. Census Bureau, particularly the paid media strategy; and (4) our recommendations for the next decennial Census in 2020.

Background on Arab Americans and the U.S. Census

Arab American advocates began a relationship with the U.S. Census Bureau in the decade following the 1980 Census, primarily to explore ways to improve definitions for and data collection on Arabs and other ancestry populations in the U.S. When a review of the questionnaire content for the 1990 decennial brought into question the need for a category on ancestry or ethnic origin, we joined with other ethnic advocates to demonstrate the value of ethnic data. Once that hurdle was overcome, my organization,

the Arab American Institute, undertook a national campaign to educate and motivate our community to participate in the 1990 Census through bilingual posters, mailings and public service announcements in the Arabic language media. During this time, AAI also worked with the Bureau to formulate a category to report Arab ancestries in the aggregate, since most sub groups fell below the reporting thresholds and were invisible for public review.

It was following the 1990 Census that we stepped up engagement around Census data collection and categories. When the Congress and Administration held hearings in 1993 to review OMB categories on race and ethnic classification, AAI testified that current federal definitions (whereby persons from the Middle East and North Africa [MENA] are classified in an undifferentiated White race category along with the majority European-origin populations) were inadequate at best and confusing to the growing number of immigrants from that region. At that time, we proposed an ethnic category that would, like Hispanic Origin, complement race data and allow for more specific data analysis of the growing populations from the MENA region.

By the mid 1990s, we were obliged to shift our focus from new ethnic categories to saving the one already available. When a federal agency review of questions to be considered for the 2000 Census put in jeopardy the inclusion of the ancestry question on the census long, or sample, form, AAI worked with advocates from the Italian, Polish, German, Hungarian, Greek, Armenian and other ethnic communities to form a national Working Group on Ancestry in the U.S. Census to defend the need for and value of

ancestry data collection. Our working group received considerable attention and support from the staff at the Bureau who briefed our members regularly on the status of the questionnaire content and our options within the federal review process. Our working group met with congressional members and worked with Rep. Connie Morella (R-MD) in 1997 to introduce H. Con. Res. 38 that supported keeping the ancestry question. Finally, the federal review concluded that legal decisions have been linked to civil rights violations against White subgroups (like Arabs and Jews), thereby supporting the federal mandate for data on ancestry. The result of this decision was a robust outreach effort by many ethnic communities to encourage participation in the 2000 Census.

In this lead up to the 2000 Census there were a number of formal collaborations between Arab Americans and the Bureau. In 1994 Commerce Secretary Ron Brown supported including an Arab American representative on the Decennial Census Advisory Committee. Presence on the CAC allowed our community to advocate for Arabic-language media buys, and by 1999 AAI signed on as an official national partner for Census 2000 and developed another bilingual outreach campaign. That partnership and the support of the Detroit Regional Office staff opened doors to funding for promotional materials in Arabic that were distributed through community based organizations located in areas with high immigrant populations. Local Census Offices were located in Dearborn, Brooklyn, and other areas with large concentrations of Arab immigrants, resulting in markedly better response rates than the previous decennial.

When the Census Bureau expanded its Census Information Center (CIC) program in the immediate aftermath of the 2000 Census, AAI was selected as a CIC to provide data products and analysis on the Arab ancestry population. A decision to produce a report on Americans of Arab ancestry was made in the summer of 2001, just months before the national tragedy that would throw a spotlight on Arab and Muslim Americans and create an unprecedented demand on information about these populations—data that would help counter the backlash, educate school children, and in general inform the public about the role Americans of Arab origin have played in building the nation for over a century.

The attention paid to Arab Americans in the wake of September 11 allowed for many “teaching moments” to contrast the prejudice and fear that emerged in both popular and political culture, but it also manifested itself in a damaging way when national security policies were implemented that were often based on racial profiling and other ineffective programs that targeted large segments of the Arab and Muslim populations based solely on national origin or religious affiliation. Over the past decade, the visibility and vulnerability of Americans with Arab or Muslim heritage has created an existential tension: advocates must work hard to challenge aspects of counter terrorism policies that are ineffective and harm innocent Americans, and at the same time cooperate with outreach efforts to recruit Arab and Muslim Americans to share language skills, cultural competency and other expertise so much in demand for our country’s intelligence, diplomatic and military endeavors.

Hard to Count Arab American Communities

This political and security climate plays a significant role in how Arab Americans view the 2010 Census. I would like to outline three segments of the Arab American community who will fall into the HTC category for Census participation:

- (1) **Traditionally HTC:** Like in other immigrant communities, Arab immigrant families with less experience in the U.S. and lower English proficiency fall within the traditional HTC parameters; many immigrants left countries where the government does not play a positive role in their lives, and they are therefore suspicious of interaction with government officials or requests.
- (2) **Post 9/11 HTC:** During the last Census, we were able to heighten awareness and appreciation of the Census in our ethnic community and with the help of promotional materials and community partnerships were able to see an increase in response rates in areas with high concentrations of Arab Americans. Since the tragedy of 9/11, many Arab Americans who were not previously mistrustful of the government were now offended by federal government policies that inserted racial profiling as a counter-terrorism tool in law enforcement, intelligence gathering and immigration procedures. The exposure in 2004 that staff of the Department of Homeland Security requested data sets on county-level concentrations of Arab Americans from the U.S. Census Bureau further projected an image to the general Arab American public that federal agencies were colluding to target us, regardless of the reality that the DHS data requests were publicly available on the Census website. Arab Americans who were willing and cooperative census respondents prior to the onset of racial profiling policies are

now suspicious and less likely to appreciate the special protections afforded the answers they provide in the U.S. Census.

(3) **Identity HTC:** The third factor that affects Arab American participation in the Census relates to the race categories as defined by the OMB and which are reflected on the 2010 Census. The undifferentiated White and Black race categories--unlike Asian, Native American/Alaska Natives, and Hispanic Origin, which encourage subgroup identification--have caused confusion, alienation and even anger within segments of the American population with origins in the MENA region. Many immigrants and second generation Arab Americans do not understand the race distinctions codified by the OMB and have lived through experiences, both before and after 9/11, where they do not feel treated like the White majority population, and therefore do not relate to that racial classification. The great attention to pluralism and ethnic/racial diversity in American civic discourse has further added to this disconnect between race classification and the active participation of Arab Americans in the promotion of racial justice and tolerance, the defense of civil liberties, and the support for national security policies that do not punish immigrants or resort to racial profiling. Given this context, and the fact that ancestry data are no longer collected in the decennial census operation, activists and advocates have the dilemma of encouraging participation in a survey which does not appear to recognize who Arab Americans are. One community activist has even called for a boycott of the 2010 Census since the federal government does not “respect” the unique needs and identity of this constituency.

One result of this identity issue is that many organizations representing populations who are not differentiated through the race question plan to circumvent the problem by urging their members to use “Some Other Race” as a way to specify ethnic or national origin. While this option will not alter the edited race statistics that are published, it will allow researchers to study, through special tabulations, the extent of race confusion in distinct ethnic communities.

Advertising the 2010 Census to the Arab American Community

While advertising alone will not reverse all of the challenges outlined above, we recognize and appreciate the serious effort made by the Bureau to reach the Arab Americans and convince them of the safety and value of Census participation. The early decision to include “emerging” language communities (Arabic, Polish, Russian), beyond the recognized race and ethnic minority groups, in the paid advertising campaign was a positive step, even though the percentage of the overall budget was understandably small. The Census Bureau listened carefully to recommendations to address concerns about privacy and confidentiality in the early phases of Census planning and conducted focus groups to study opinions and attitudes of Arab Americans towards the Census process.

Our participation on the Census Advisory Committee permitted a dynamic interaction with the planning process for the 2010 Census communications strategy, a process that sought advice and feedback from the early stages of conceptualization to review of the messages and creative design. I was impressed with the effort made by the Census staff to solicit input from our community, which included offering me a seat on the Joint Advisory Advertising Review Panel (JAARP); when I was unable to attend one of the

meetings to review the creative campaign, Bureau staff arranged an alternative time for my organization to view the Arabic language portion of the campaign. When members of the CAC requested additional meetings to review the final cuts of the advertising campaign, the Bureau staff made the necessary arrangements, even though that level of consultation was not envisioned in the original plan.

The attention given to the multiple messages required to address the concerns of Arab Americans—safety, confidentiality, civic participation and ethnic pride—was clear throughout the planning process and creative design for the Arabic language segment of the campaign. The agency chosen by Draft FCB to handle the Arabic campaign has a proven track record of professionalism and experience in working with the Arabic-speaking market, and has relationships beyond the Census contract to draw on for advice and feedback.

It should be noted that efforts to reach the Arab American community extend beyond the paid advertising campaign. A number of Regional Census Offices, most notably Detroit, Philadelphia, New York and Los Angeles, have dedicated resources from their partnership programs (which in this Census has been integrated with the paid media campaign to assure common messages and shared impact) for outreach to Arab communities in their area. Detroit, in particular — with leadership from Regional Director Dwight Dean — has led the way by arranging for the translation of outreach materials into Arabic as early as last summer and assigning a team of up to six partnership specialists and assistants to work with the Middle Eastern communities.

Finally, my organization, in its capacity as a national partner, is preparing a “trusted voices” Public Service Announcement (PSA) campaign to be launched later this month in the Arabic language media. We have received the assistance of the same agency hired to produce the paid media ads for the Census Bureau, but they are offering design and production services as a *pro-bono* contribution to this partnership effort. And the Census Communications team has offered to send a letter to the media contacts receiving paid ads, requesting their consideration of running the Trusted Voices PSA at no cost.

Summary and Recommendations

Our overall evaluation of the 2010 Census Integrated Communications Campaign is that it represents significant improvement over previous Census efforts, by coordinating the paid media and partnership efforts, by early and regular feedback from advisors who work with HTC communities, and by empowering the Regional Offices to launch robust outreach campaigns to community-based groups within the HTC populations. We understand that adequate resources and time are perennial challenges to any Census operation, and that there is never enough of either to assure a perfect process. We also understand that the multiple and sometimes competing interests of diverse advisory bodies make the consultative process complex, demand extraordinary patience, and result in decisions that are bound to disappoint some stakeholders.

As a stakeholder, Arab Americans are committed to working with the Bureau not only in the final weeks of 2010 Census promotion and through the enumeration, but in the months and years following the decennial operation. Our interests going forward include

studying the impact of the paid media campaign, the extent to which Some Other Race is selected by Arab respondents and, most importantly, the results of the experimental 2010 census panels that will evaluate alternative ways to word questions on race and ethnicity. We plan to work closely with the Bureau as it conducts new research into adding a question on Ancestry, along with race and Hispanic Origin, in the 2020 census. It is our hope that Congress will devote attention early in the decade to these dynamic and important issues of our nation's changing racial and ethnic composition.