



New Yorkers Reject Proposed Census Citizenship Question

February 16, 2018

Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

We are community, labor, and legal advocacy organizations across New York State who represent the interests of hundreds of thousands of working-class New Yorkers and care deeply about making sure that every New Yorker is counted in the upcoming decennial census. We write to urge you to reject the reckless request by the Department of Justice to add a new citizenship question to the 2020 Census. This unwise, and frankly dangerous, request would threaten the prospect of an accurate count across our state and the country, and it would fly in the face of years of research.

If you and your staff are sincere in the desire you have expressed to ensure an accurate and complete count of all New Yorkers and Americans, then you must ensure that the Census process does not become a tool for intimidating and punishing immigrant communities. Since the 18th Century, the Census has been clear that all people residing in this country—citizen and non-citizen alike—should be counted. Adding a citizenship question would undoubtedly reduce response rates in diverse communities across New York and the country, as it will increase fears about whether or not the information will be confidential and how it will be used. This late, ill-considered revision would produce a devastating chilling effect in our communities. Moreover, this is not just a concern in immigrant communities—it will jeopardize a full, fair count in all communities, and especially communities of color.

It bears mention that accepting the Department of Justice's unwise request would also be directly at odds with all of the best available research and would add substantial cost and disruption to a Census process that Congress is already underfunding. Nor does the Department of Justice's argument pass muster. There is absolutely no reason connected to the Voting Rights Act—which the current Department leadership has been quite happy to flout in other circumstances over the past year—to add this question, and the contention that there has been a citizenship question on the “short form” is simply not true. As more than 200 organizations around the country have expressed to you: “Estimates of the citizen voting-age population derived from the ongoing American Community Survey, and the so-called census ‘long’ or sample form before that, have been and continue to be suitable for purposes of civil rights and Voting Rights Act enforcement.”

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The consequences of adding a citizenship question, and the resulting undercounting in our communities, would be dire indeed. The Census is absolutely critical to determining representation for our communities and federal funding for vital government programs—as well as providing indispensable information for local and state government to make policy and budget decisions. Resources for our communities’ schools, hospitals and health centers, infrastructure, housing, and more is on the line. Finally, census data are also critical for non-profit organizations like ours to make planning decisions on how best to serve their communities. Businesses similarly rely heavily on Census data to make their investment and planning decisions.

The Department of Justice’s assertions regarding adding a citizenship question are patently false and irresponsible. Their request is nothing more than an attempt to obstruct the Census process and intimidate our diverse communities, and should be dismissed accordingly.

We thus urge you to reject the reckless request by the Department of Justice to add a citizenship question to the upcoming 2020 Census.

If you would like to discuss these concerns further, or have any questions about them, please contact us as follows:

Sincerely,

32BJ SEIU
Alliance for Quality Education
Atlas DIY
CAAAY
Center for Popular Democracy
Churches United for Fair Housing
Citizen Action of New York
Common Cause / NY
Communications Workers of America District 1
Community Voices Heard
District Council 37, AFSCME
DRUM - Desis Rising Up and Moving
Empire State Indivisible
Hispanic Federation
Immigrant Defense Project
Indivisible Nation BK
Kathryn O. Greenberg Immigration Justice Clinic, Cardozo School of Law
Jews for Racial and Economic Justice
LiUNA Local 78
Long Island Civic Engagement Table
Long Island Progressive Coalition
Make the Road New York
New York Communities for Change
Strong Economy for All Coalition
Urban Youth Collaborative
VOCAL-NY
Working Families Party