

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

March 9, 2022

The Honorable Gina Raimondo  
Secretary  
Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Robert Santos  
Director  
United States Census Bureau  
Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo and Director Santos:

We are writing to share our concerns regarding new reports indicating that America's Black population was likely disproportionately undercounted by the 2020 Census, possibly exceeding 2010 undercount rates.<sup>1</sup> If true, this is unacceptable, and we seek to understand how you plan to investigate and address these concerns.

Preliminary independent research estimates indicate that the Black population was undercounted during the 2020 Census at a rate nearly three times as high as the previous 2010 Census.<sup>2</sup> Particularly concerning is the finding that Black children may have been undercounted in 2020 at a rate nearly ten times higher than in 2010.<sup>3</sup>

As you know, Census data plays an enormous but often silent role in Americans' daily lives, informing legislative representation and the distribution of hundreds of billions of federal dollars and other resources each year.<sup>4</sup> A Census that does not accurately represent Black communities robs them of their equal share of federal resources in education, health care, housing, nutrition assistance, and many other areas—perpetuating systemic racism.

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<sup>1</sup> Tara Bahrapour, "2020 Census may have undercounted Black Americans, new analyses say," *The Washington Post*, October 13, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-vi/2021/10/13/2020-census-black-undercount/>.

<sup>2</sup> Constance F. Citro, "Preliminary Assessment of Aspects of Census Quality Via Demographic Analysis," October 16, 2021, <https://nvl.org/demography-is-destiny>.

<sup>3</sup> William P. O'Hare, "The High Net Undercount of Black and Hispanic Children in the 2020 Census," Count All Kids, 2021, <https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.229/2hj.858.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/High-Net-Undercount-of-Black-and-Hispanic-Children-in-the-2020-Census-10-4-2021.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Why We Conduct the Decennial Census of Population and Housing," <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/about/why.html>.

We also know that the implementation of the 2020 Census as a whole was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its residual effects, including increased hunger, housing insecurity, and poverty. We are deeply concerned that disparities in the 2020 Census count were further exacerbated by the Trump Administration's efforts to politicize the Census for partisan gain, including the decision to abruptly end Census operations prematurely.<sup>5</sup>

The Census has a long and troubling history of undercounting Black communities, which helps drive economic inequities and skews political representation.<sup>6</sup> We understand that the Census Bureau will evaluate the accuracy of the 2020 Census through the forthcoming Post-Enumeration Survey (PES); in the meantime, we are seeking additional information about how the Department will address a potential increase in the Black undercount.

Therefore, we respectfully request answers to the following questions as soon as possible:

1. What has the Department done to study the differential undercount of the Black population?
2. When undercounts have occurred in the past, what actions has the Department taken to remedy the situation?
3. Does the Department have any preliminary estimates of the undercount by race, ethnicity and substate geography?
4. When will the Department release the PES results detailing net undercounts and Census "omissions" for demographic groups?
5. How will the results of the Post-Enumeration Survey inform the Department's plans to address a potential undercount? What are the options for adjustment?
6. Given the challenges to implementing the PES—ranging from "census fatigue"<sup>7</sup> to unusually high rates of displacement since the reference date of April 1, 2020—how will the Department verify the PES's accuracy and fitness for gauging the undercount of racial and ethnic populations, and what other data sets can be used to obtain an accurate assessment?
7. What authority, if any, does the Department have to ensure that districts and their residents are not negatively impacted by the undercount, particularly regarding potentially inadequate federal funding allocations caused by a significant undercount?
8. Will the Department provide more flexible options for tribal, state, and local governments to challenge their counts for the benefit of accurate federal funding allocations?
9. Will the Department expand the Census Count Question Resolution program to provide for impacted governmental units with undercounts exceeding 2010 levels?

<sup>5</sup> Michael Wines and Richard Fausset, "With Census Count Finishing Early, Fears of a Skewed Tally Rise," *The New York Times*, August 4, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/04/us/2020-census-ending-early.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Mona Chalabi, "How the US census misses people of color – and why it's so harmful," *The Guardian*, February 27, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/datablog/2020/feb/27/2020-us-census-black-people-mistakes-count>.

<sup>7</sup> Hansi Lo Wang, "How many people of color did the 2020 census miss? COVID makes it harder to tell," *National Public Radio*, November 18, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/08/1043506293/2020-census-results-accuracy-undercount-populations-post-enumeration-survey>.



10. What other avenues do state and local governments have available to them to challenge the numbers?
11. What actions, if any, will the Department undertake to address this specific situation, including prioritizing the differential undercount of the Black population on the 2030 Census research agenda?

Finally, we request that Director Santos provide a full briefing to the Congressional Black Caucus on this issue and the steps he plans to take to rectify it as soon as possible. We look forward to hearing from you and working with you to address this troubling and time-sensitive situation.

Sincerely,



Dwight Evans  
Member of Congress



Lauren Underwood  
Member of Congress



Joyce Beatty  
Member of Congress



Anthony G. Brown  
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress



Gwen S. Moore  
Member of Congress



Danny K. Davis  
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Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.  
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Nikema Williams  
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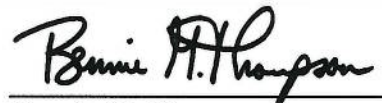
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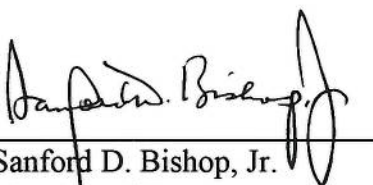
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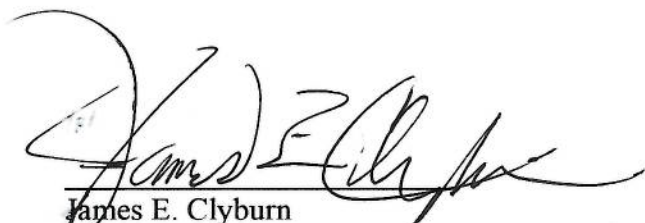
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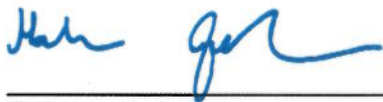
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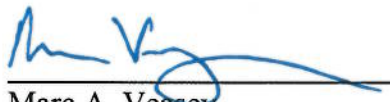
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