



February 22, 2019

The Honorable Steven Dillingham
Director
U.S. Census Bureau

Re: Questionnaire Assistance Centers for the 2020 Census

Dear Director Dillingham,

On behalf of the American Library Association (ALA), I write to respectfully call your attention to recent Congressional direction that the Census Bureau “shall devote funding to ... open local questionnaire assistance centers in hard-to-count communities” in the 2020 Census.¹

To effectively implement this new directive, we urge the Bureau to promptly begin planning for Questionnaire Assistance Centers in the 2020 Census, in consultation with stakeholders. These plans should address the unique needs of this Decennial Census, including the new Internet Self-Response option.

Libraries hosted more than 6,000 Questionnaire Assistance Centers and Be Counted sites in the 2010 Census,² and we believe they are ready to do so again, if given the opportunity.

Libraries offer ideal locations for Questionnaire Assistance Centers in many hard-to-count communities: 99% of Census tracts with the lowest self-response rates in 2010 are located within five miles of a public library.³ Furthermore, many residents with lower Internet connectivity or skills will turn to their local library to access the new Internet Self-Response option, and 98% of tracts with poor Internet access are located within five miles of a public library.⁴

ALA would welcome the opportunity to contribute our perspective to plans for Questionnaire Assistance Centers in the 2020 Census and discuss the resources that libraries can offer.⁵ Thank you for your consideration. If we can provide additional information, please contact me at gbaker@alawash.org or (202) 628-8410.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gavin R. Baker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gavin R. Baker
Assistant Director of Government Relations

The American Library Association (ALA) is the foremost national organization providing resources to inspire library and information professionals to transform their communities through essential programs and services. For more than 140 years, the ALA has been the trusted voice for academic, public, school, government and special libraries, advocating for the profession and the library's role in enhancing learning and ensuring access to information for all.

¹ H. Rept. 116-9 (2019), at 611; conference report accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019, Pub. L. No. 116-6, div. C, title I (2019).

² Geoff Jackson, Keith Wechter, and Susanna Winder, “2010 Census Be Counted and Questionnaire Assistance Centers Assessment,” U.S. Census Bureau (May 22, 2012), at 27, available at <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2010/program-management/5-review/cpex/2010-memo-194.pdf>. See also recommendations at 98 (recommending that future Questionnaire Assistance Centers “use an electronic data collection method and implement kiosks” and be established “in standard facility types (e.g. DMV, libraries).”)

³ Center for Urban Research at the Graduate Center, City University of New York, “Public Libraries and the 2020 Census” (Oct. 23, 2018), available at <https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Page-Elements/Academics-Research-Centers-Initiatives/Centers-and-Institutes/Center-for-Urban-Research/CUR-research-initiatives/Public-Libraries-and-the-2020-Census>.

⁴ *Id.* See also S. Rept. 115-275 (2018), at 17 (“The [Senate Appropriations] Committee urges the Census Bureau to conduct outreach to public libraries and other community technology centers to ensure that they are fully informed about the Internet self-response option for the 2020 Decennial Census and equipped to support residents in census participation. The Bureau should work with libraries, in coordination with the Institute of Museum and Library Services, as part of the overall strategy to maximize survey response.”).

⁵ See American Library Association, “Libraries and the 2020 Census: Vital Partners for a Complete Count” (October 2018), available at <https://bit.ly/CountOnLibraries>.