

**Public Witness Testimony of
Kathi Kromer, Associate Executive Director of the American Library Association
On the FY 2020 Request for the Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census
Before the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
April 4, 2019**

On behalf of the American Library Association (ALA), I write to respectfully request adequate funding for the U.S. Census Bureau to conduct the 2020 Census, including funding for Integrated Partnership and Communications activities and for Questionnaire Assistance Centers.

Census experts have raised concerns that the President’s budget proposal for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 will be inadequate for the Census Bureau to carry out its Constitutional obligation to count every person residing in the United States.

If the Census Bureau does not have the resources necessary to do its job, then states and communities across the country will lose funding, representation, and information crucial to decision-making. That loss of funding and representation will last for a decade – and the loss of information will last forever.

Integrated Partnership and Communications activities

We urge the Subcommittee to provide adequate funding for Integrated Partnership and Communications activities, which are essential to achieving an efficient and accurate Census.

As the Census Bureau notes, in the upcoming fiscal year, “The formation of key national partnerships and the cultivation of hundreds of thousands of other local relationships necessary to ensure the Census Bureau can maximize self-response across all localities and population groups will occur at peak levels of intensity.”¹

ALA and libraries across the country will be among those partners working to provide information to the public about responding to the 2020 Census. As a demonstration of this commitment, on April 1, 2019, the president of the American Library Association spoke at the Census Bureau’s press briefing marking one year to Census Day.² Adequate funding for Integrated Partnership and Communications activities ensures that partners will have the messages and materials to support their communities in achieving a complete count.

Questionnaire Assistance Centers

Similarly, it will be critical to provide sufficient funding for Questionnaire Assistance Centers. In the FY 2019 conference report, Congress directed the Census Bureau to “devote funding to ...

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, “U.S. Census Bureau’s Budget Fiscal Year 2020,” March 2019, at CEN-95, *available at* https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2019-03/fy2020_census_congressional_budget_justification_0.pdf.

² U.S. Census Bureau, “Census Bureau Press Briefing Marks One Year Out From Census Day,” April 1, 2019, *available at* <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/one-year-out.html>.

open local questionnaire assistance centers in hard-to-count communities” in the 2020 Census.³ However, the Census Bureau’s FY 2020 budget submission does not describe how the Bureau will implement that direction or what additional resources are needed in order to do so.

On March 19, 2019, ALA joined 90 stakeholder organizations in a letter to the Census Bureau, expressing our view that “a robust program of Questionnaire Assistance Centers is crucial to provide an effective on-the-ground presence for the 2020 Census in local communities in order to raise public awareness, deliver trustworthy information, and provide options for self-respondents to receive questionnaire assistance.”⁴

With the reduced number of regional and area census offices in the 2020 Census, we expect that many people will turn to their local public library for information about the Census. While libraries are preparing in order to address the public’s questions about the Census, they cannot do so alone, and they should not have to. In fact, libraries hosted more than 6,000 Questionnaire Assistance Centers and Be Counted sites in the 2010 Census.⁵ We believe that libraries are ready to do so again, if Congress and the Census Bureau commit the funding to operate those sites.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony regarding appropriations for the U.S. Census Bureau in FY 2020. We ask for the Subcommittee’s support in providing adequate funding, including for Integrated Partnership and Communications activities and for Questionnaire Assistance Centers.

Sincerely,

Kathi Kromer
Associate Executive Director, Public Policy and Advocacy
American Library Association

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.

³ H. Rept. 116-9 (2019), at 611.

⁴ Letter from 90 stakeholder organizations to Census Bureau Director Dillingham, “Questionnaire Assistance Centers for the 2020 Census – Stakeholder Recommendations,” March 19, 2019, available at <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/govinfo/Sign-ons/Questionnaire%20Assistance%20Center%20recommendations%20031919%20%281%29.pdf>.

⁵ 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>.