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April 14, 2020

Dr. Steven Dillingham
Director
U.S. Census Bureau
4600 Silver Hill Road
Suitland, MD 20746

Dear Dr. Dillingham:

We greatly appreciate all that the Census Bureau has done over the past few weeks to alter operations for the 2020 Census in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the Census Bureau continues to shift operations to align with evolving public health guidance, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) would like to work with you to ensure that the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) community is fully counted in the 2020 Census.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 crisis has upended the lives of millions of Americans and changed the way we go about our daily lives. Due to social distancing measures and stay-at-home orders in multiple states, many of the in-person outreach strategies the Census Bureau had initially planned to conduct are no longer feasible without posing a significant risk to public health. Much of this outreach was focused on in-person contact by Census staff and Census Partners, such as canvassing, Mobile Questionnaire Assistance, and in-person outreach at events and places where people gather. The Census Bureau emphasized that any gaps in language access and in-language advertising would be addressed at the local level through Census Partners, hiring from within hard-to-count communities, and meeting people where they are. Because it will likely be impossible to execute these strategies as planned during the enumeration period, we urge the Census Bureau to reassess its outreach to limited English proficient (LEP) individuals and other hard-to-count communities.

Although the Census Bureau has demonstrated that Americans across the country are still responding to the 2020 Census, these response rates have been uneven. For instance, many census tracts with a high density of AANHPIs, particularly those in New York, are responding to the census at dramatically lower rates than the country overall. Early analysis of response rates has also shown that the national response rate is lower at this point in the enumeration period than it was in 2010. Furthermore, it has been shown that communities with a high percentage of limited

English proficient individuals have even lower response rates.¹ We are greatly concerned that without traditional outreach methods, as well as innovative methods to mimic the effect of those traditional outreach efforts, an undercount of the AANHPI community and other historically undercounted populations will likely occur.

Accordingly, we urge the Census Bureau to take the following actions to compensate for diminished in-person outreach while ensuring that 2020 Census operations do not pose a threat to public health and safety:

- **Bolster Paid Advertising to the AAPI Community:** While we applaud the Census Bureau's original outreach strategy that aimed to conduct in-person outreach in 59 languages, it is imperative that the Census Bureau develops a new plan to fill current gaps in its outreach plans to reach LEP persons and other hard-to-count communities. Bolstering paid, in-language advertising is one way to achieve this. We urge the Census Bureau to continue to utilize its robust funding to increase paid advertising for 2020 Census outreach, as well as to expand the number of languages in which paid advertising will be conducted. In particular, we ask that the Census Bureau makes TV ad buys in South Asian languages and other AAPI languages where possible; expand the online and social media advertising program to all 59 languages in which in-person outreach would have been conducted; expand in-languages ad buys in print and radio media to include more AAPI languages; begin an in-language direct mail non-response follow-up program; and continue ad buys throughout the entire enumeration period.
- **Utilize Census Partners:** As trusted community voices, Census Partners must remain an integral part of the 2020 Census outreach strategy to AANHPIs and other hard to count communities. We urge the Census Bureau to continue to work on finding alternative means for Census Partners to get out the count. While the reach of many Census Partners is limited by social distancing measures, outreach can still be conducted online through social media and email, as well as by mail and by phone.
- **Provide Weekly Response Rates to Congress:** CAPAC Members have made several requests for data on the progress of the 2020 Census within their respective congressional districts. As the Census Bureau shifts operations to address the COVID-19 pandemic, we ask that the Census Bureau provide all congressional offices with weekly updates on the progress of the 2020 Census. In particular, we ask that the Census Bureau provide a projected response rate for the AANHPI community and other communities of color to the best of its ability. While we are aware that it is impossible to know the response rate by demographic group before tabulation begins, we ask that the Census Bureau use other proxies such as community demographics by geography to track this critical information.

¹ CUNY Center for Urban Research, Census 2020 Response Rate Analysis Week 1, <https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Page-Elements/Academics-Research-Centers-Initiatives/Centers-and-Institutes/Center-for-Urban-Research/CUR-research-initiatives/Census-2020-Response-Rate-Analysis-Week-1>

- **Address Long Wait Times for Census Call Centers:** In order to adapt to the current public health crisis, the Census Bureau implemented social distancing policies in call centers that provide over-the-phone enumeration. An unfortunate consequence of this policy is that wait times increased significantly for respondents who attempted to complete the Census over the phone. Many LEP respondents with limited internet access have been utilizing the phone response option to access in-language assistance. Some of these respondents have reported waiting for extended periods of time on the line for in-language assistance, while others have been unable to connect with operators in their language of choice. The Census Bureau recently announced that the capacity of call centers will be increased to remedy this problem. We applaud the Census Bureau for taking action, but also encourage the Bureau to continue to monitor wait times and adjust accordingly as needed.
- **Provide Updates on Staff Demographics:** When the Census Bureau is able to safely resume partial or full operations, we ask that the Census Bureau provide us with data on the number of Census field staff that have been onboarded within each congressional district. This data should be disaggregated and include the race, ethnicity, and language capabilities of the onboarded staff, statistics on the degree to which the demographics and language capabilities of onboarded staff are reflective of the communities in which they are performing outreach, and statistics on the number of field staff who are geographically from the communities they are performing outreach to.
- **Assess Alternatives to In-Person Outreach:** We urge the Census Bureau to continue to refrain from any in-person outreach to non-responding households that may jeopardize public health. Given the well-documented historical undercount of communities of color, we encourage the Census Bureau to consider other means of performing non-response follow-up in order to mitigate the need for in-person follow-up that may disproportionately put the health of communities of color at risk.

In addition to the aforementioned requests, we would also like to ask the Census Bureau to respond to the following questions by no later than Tuesday, April 21, 2020.

1. How is the Census Bureau altering its overall outreach strategy while field operations are suspended?
2. How will this altered strategy reach hard-to-count communities and the AANHPI community in particular?
3. How is the Census Bureau adjusting its communications plan in response to COVID-19?
4. How much funding has the Census Bureau already shifted to the communications program, and how much additional funding does the Census Bureau plan on shifting to the communications program? Please provide as much detail as possible on additional expenditures for advertising and other forms of communication in light of operational adjustments and COVID-19 related challenges.

5. How is the Census Bureau planning on using its carryover funds to adapt operations for the 2020 Census? Please provide as much detail as possible on how carryover funds are being utilized for operational adjustments and COVID-19 related challenges.
6. What is the status of the Census Bureau's planned South Asian language ad buys and what media markets will these ads appear in?
7. What other languages is the Census Bureau planning on expanding their paid media program to?
8. To address the fact that the COVID-19 crisis is changing where people usually are, will the Census Bureau conduct targeted outreach to college students as part of bolstering its paid advertising to ensure students know where they should be counted? Is there a plan to conduct specific outreach to AANHPI students and other hard to count populations, such as partnering with Minority Serving Institutions? Please provide as much detail as possible on how the Bureau will address this issue.
9. What methods for non-response follow-up is the Census Bureau planning on utilizing while in-person outreach is untenable?
10. How is the Census Bureau currently assessing response rates from hard-to-count communities and the AANHPI community in particular?
11. How has the Census Bureau continued to collaborate and work with local Census Partners even though current field operations have been suspended?
12. Households in the insular areas of Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands are enumerated in person and do not have the option of completing the Census online, over the phone, or by mail. How is the Census Bureau planning to ensure that the insular areas are enumerated while field operations are postponed?
13. The Census Bureau recently announced that it is taking steps to decrease wait times for over the phone respondents by reinstating the callback option and making more employees available to respond to requests. How much has capacity been increased at call centers, and what is the increase per call center, per language option, and per language per call center?
14. If the Census Bureau is utilizing remote operators in its call centers, what has the increase in remote operating capacity been, and how does this increase differ by language option? What is the new average wait time overall and per language option?

We appreciate all that the Census Bureau has done to adapt its operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Please continue to keep us updated whenever significant changes are made regarding the 2020 Census. We look forward to receiving your response to our letter, as well as our continued work together to ensure the AANHPI community is fully counted in the 2020 Census.

Sincerely,



Judy Chu
Member of Congress
CAPAC Chair



Grace Meng
Member of Congress
CAPAC First Vice Chair

/s/ Kamala Harris

Kamala Harris
U.S. Senator

/s/ Mark Takano

Mark Takano
Member of Congress
CAPAC Second Vice Chair

/s/ Ted W. Lieu

Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress
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/s/ Ed Case

Ed Case
Member of Congress

/s/ Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr.

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Member of Congress

/s/ TJ Cox

TJ Cox
Member of Congress

/s/ Ro Khanna

Ro Khanna
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/s/ Barbara Lee

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/s/ Michael F.Q. San Nicolas

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/s/ David Trone

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/s/ Nydia M. Velázquez

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