



CONSORTIUM of SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

## 2018 Social Science Advocacy Day Talking Points: Citizenship on the 2020 Census

### THE CENSUS IS AN IRREPLACEABLE DATA RESOURCE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH.

- Social and behavioral scientists use data from the census to generate evidence that allows us to produce science-backed solutions for addressing issues of national and global importance.
- On its own, the decennial census is a critically important source of data for social science research. However, it is also the foundation for numerous other surveys and data sets produced by the Census Bureau and other federal statistical agencies.

### THE LAST-MINUTE DECISION TO ADD A CITIZENSHIP QUESTION CIRCUMVENTS PROCESSES ESTABLISHED TO ENSURE A FAIR AND ACCURATE COUNT.

- The Census Bureau takes any proposed change to the decennial questionnaire very seriously. Even the smallest tweaks are assessed during years of research and testing to ensure they do not affect the quality or accuracy of the responses received.
- Secretary Ross's decision to add a citizenship question to the 2020 Census was made over the objections of experts at the Census Bureau and without any of this routine research and testing.
- The little research that does exist indicates that significant numbers of people might answer this question inaccurately. In addition, asking about citizenship in our current political climate could increase the numbers of people who do not respond to the census at all.
- While the American Community Survey (ACS) asks about citizenship, this survey does not go to every household. The decennial census has not included a question on citizenship since 1950. The question has never been tested or fielded in the modern Census environment—which is very different from America 70 years ago.

### WE ONLY HAVE ONE CHANCE TO GET THIS RIGHT, AND THE IMPACTS WILL BE WITH US FOR A DECADE.

- The Census Bureau has a Constitutional obligation to count every person in the country. An increase in non-response will only add to the overall cost of the Census. Every 1% drop in the response rate will add \$55 million to the total costs of the count.
- Inaccuracies in Census data will be with us for the next 10 years and would have far-reaching implications across the statistical system. We do not know what future insights will be lost if the data is compromised.
- Of course, the impact of a flawed 2020 Census goes well beyond data for research. The Census is used \$800 billion in taxpayer dollars to programs across the country, by businesses in the private sector to guide investment decisions, and by state and local governments to make better policies

### CONGRESS CAN ACT TO ENSURE A FAIR AND ACCURATE 2020 CENSUS.

- We hope that your office will commit to safeguarding the integrity of census data by ensuring that untested questions are not included on the 2020 Census. There are two legislative paths that would accomplish this goal:
  - Support **freestanding legislation** that will block this question from being added, OR
  - Support the inclusion of **report language in the fiscal year (FY) 2019 Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) appropriations bill** that directs the Census Bureau not to include questions about citizenship in its 2020 Census preparations.

COSSA can provide additional information on these two options, including current legislative vehicles. Contact information is included in your folder.