



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

April 1, 2020

Secretary Wilbur L. Ross, Jr.
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

Director Steven Dillingham, Ph.D.
U.S. Census Bureau
4600 Silver Hill Road
Washington, DC 20233

Dear Secretary Ross and Director Dillingham:

Our nation is facing an unprecedented moment – the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), has made a tremendous impact on life as we know it. Over a week ago, I issued a Stay at Home Executive Order in order to slow the spread of the virus and keep our most vulnerable populations safe and healthy. In addition, the White House Administration has issued social distancing guidelines. I am concerned that the impact of COVID-19 on our state, and more specifically in our hard-to-count (HTC) communities, will only intensify the many barriers they already face and could lead to a severe undercount in California.

California's commitment to a complete count was forged in 2018 and has grown into the largest investment ever made by any of our fifty states. We have partnered with more than 120 community-based organizations to ensure full participation in the decennial Census. COVID-19 has eliminated the ability to safely conduct person-to-person outreach through trusted messengers, which we know is the most impactful way to reach our HTC communities.

We are fortunate that our communities are resilient, and our partners are meeting the moment. Our state is working quickly to stretch our media dollars, adjust where we can, and shift tactics on a moment-by-moment basis, all while protecting public health. We are leveraging spaces and channels that remain through essential services. Partners are shifting from in-person canvassing to phone banking and going back to the basics of direct mail. Partners are receiving technical assistance and support in adjusting to digital communication tools. Yet, our effort will not be enough to match the uncertainty that lies ahead.

In addition to the factors that made nearly one in four households HTC in the first place, many Californians are now faced with incredible health risks, unemployment, and for some, fear of racial discrimination, racial profiling, and violence.

Although not a perfect comparison, as of March 30, we are already seeing a lower response rate in California than in 2010 when looking at a similar 18-day point in time. This is not just a California issue. The uncertainty tied to the spread of this virus throughout our nation threatens all U.S. Census Bureau (USCB) operations.

While the recent announcement to adjust various operational plans and delay field operations to begin after April 15, 2020 was necessary, it is not enough.

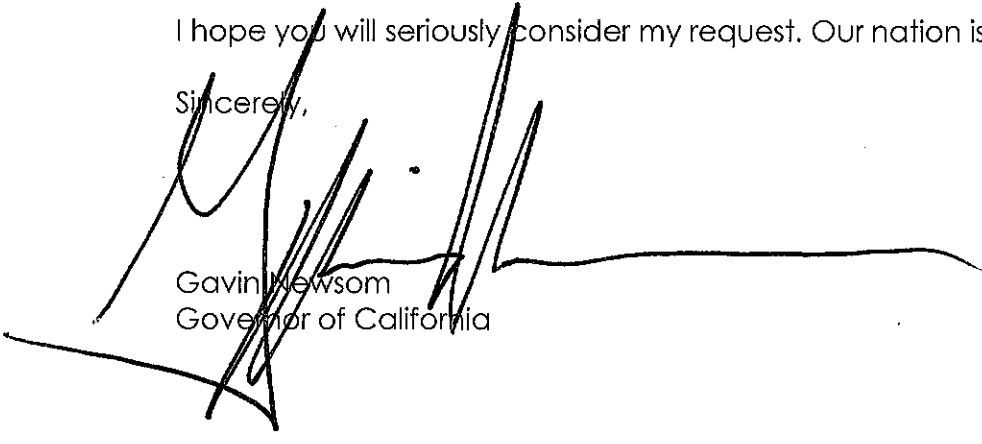
In the best interest of our nation, I respectfully request that operational timelines are more thoroughly reassessed and adjusted in a way that preserves the data quality that is so critical to our collective future. This assessment should be evidence-based and consider:

- An extension in the field operational timeline that reduces the use of administrative records. Imputation and administrative records should be the last resort to capture those Californians that may not have self-responded. We know that administrative records are unavailable for many of our HTC communities since some of these families do not have access to government services that may be relied upon as records.
- An increased investment into a well-qualified and expanded workforce that has the capacity to cover more households in a compressed timeframe. With the delay of Update Leave operations, the USCB field operation becomes ever more critical. A robust virtual training program should be deployed to educate the enumerator workforce so that when it is safe to conduct in-person enumeration, the USCB is prepared to count all communities.
- Enumeration efforts for people experiencing homelessness should be further delayed and extended. This will allow for California's COVID-19 sheltering and housing efforts to take hold. The USCB should work with counties and states to be more readily prepared for this enumeration given the dramatic change in landscape.
- Identify and make public indicators that will be used to assess and determine any future adjustments.

Given the level of uncertainty over the coming months, the recent deadline adjustments may not be enough. The USCB will need to remain cognizant of each state's landscape and continue to respect measures to protect public health in response to COVID-19. Should these measures prove insufficient, the USCB should engage with members of Congress to extend the deadline to deliver the final tabulation report to the President beyond December 31, 2020.

I hope you will seriously consider my request. Our nation is counting on your leadership.

Sincerely,



Gavin Newsom
Governor of California