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WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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February 5, 2020

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

Dear Dr. Dillingham:

I write to request that you provide information as soon as possible on the Census Bureau's plan, timeline, and budget for delivering Mobile Questionnaire Assistance Centers in the 2020 Census, as provided for in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020.

As you know, questionnaire assistance centers are meant to help improve participation in the 2020 Census by establishing a visible Census Bureau presence in areas with low response rates and providing the public with a way to immediately answer the census in these locations. It is essential that the Census Bureau deliver this operation effectively.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of Fiscal Year 2019 directed the Census Bureau to devote funding to "open local questionnaire assistance centers in hard-to-count communities." In April 2019, the Bureau submitted a proposal to Congressional appropriators for a "Mobile Response Initiative," in which Bureau staff would deploy to various community gathering places to help people self-respond to the Census.

The Bureau's proposal included transitioning up to 4,740 Recruiting Assistants into outreach roles in March 2020, and sending these staff with government-furnished tablets to community locations in low-responding areas, where people can go to answer the Census if they believe they have been missed. The staff would encourage individuals to complete their questionnaire on the provided tablet, using the online response option. Census Bureau Partnership Specialists would work with local partners to identify "high-traffic, transit-accessible, trusted" locations such as markets, festivals, and events. Congress provided \$90 million for this effort, now known as "Mobile Questionnaire Assistance Centers" (MQACs) in the Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2020 and the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020.

Given that Congress has now approved a final FY20 appropriation for this new 2020 Census operation, I request that the Census Bureau provide the authorizing committees with a detailed operational plan, including a budget and timeline for implementation. I also request that the plan address the following topics.

- The number of Recruiting Assistants who will convert to MQAC positions, and where these staff will be located, including whether there will be an equal number from each Area Census Office and whether the Bureau will account for staff's proximity to low-response areas;
- The length and type of training the Bureau will provide Recruiting Assistants to ensure they transition effectively to the outreach and enumeration responsibilities required for MQACs;
- The criteria partnership specialists will use to evaluate potential MQAC sites within selected low-response areas and to set MQAC hours, and the process they will use to engage partners in this effort;
- How the Bureau plans to inform the public and partners about the locations, hours, and functions of MQACs in a timely manner, and whether the Census Bureau will use its Communication Plan contingency reserve to purchase local paid media for this purpose;
- How the Bureau will provide the public with verification of Census Bureau employees' identity at MQACs to prevent members of the public from providing responses to fraudulent actors;
- How the Bureau will identify and tabulate responses collected at MQACs to determine how many were collected at each location; and
- What metrics the Bureau will collect during the MQAC operation to evaluate its performance, including its metrics and processes for evaluating staff performance.

Given that the 2020 Census self-response period will begin in March 2020 and this operation must be implemented in an expedited manner, I request that you provide this plan as soon as possible. Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gary C. Peters". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Gary C. Peters
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs