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United States Senate

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February 26, 2020

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

Dear Director Dillingham:

I am contacting you regarding your efforts to combat disinformation and misinformation about the 2020 Census. The outcome of the Decennial Census is crucial for every individual and family, since it will help determine the allocation of resources for health care, education, infrastructure, and other community needs, as well as representation in Congress. Each household must be able to easily and confidently respond to the census knowing that their personal information is safe and their participation is important.

A significant threat to the census is the spread of incorrect information that could dissuade people from responding: both disinformation disseminated by bad actors, potentially including foreign adversaries, as well as misinformation unwittingly circulated by well-meaning individuals. I am concerned about any inaccurate information that would discourage responses, such as any misrepresentation of how individuals can participate, who is eligible to participate, or misleading statements that imply there will be negative consequences for participating.

I applaud the Census Bureau's work so far to actively address these threats. You have established a "Trust and Safety Team" that coordinates with "external technology and social media platforms, partner and stakeholder organizations, and cybersecurity officials" to protect the 2020 Census and ensure the public receives accurate information. This team will monitor "available channels and open platforms for misinformation and disinformation about the census" while working with partners and stakeholders to quickly respond to any identified issues. You have also encouraged the public to report suspicious information to rumors@census.gov to help ensure the Bureau can respond quickly and appropriately to false 2020 Census information.

I also appreciate that you are working with a number of social media companies to combat the spread of disinformation and misinformation. These private organizations are in unique positions to support the Bureau's fight against misinformation and disinformation throughout the 2020 Census, including during the awareness, self-response, and Nonresponse Followup phases. Based on your work, several companies have already updated their content management policies and announced other efforts to specifically address the census.

I would like to request further details about how these companies are working with the Census Bureau to ensure disinformation and misinformation are addressed quickly and effectively by all relevant parties. In particular, I am requesting information about how companies and the Bureau will operationalize their policies and coordinate on a daily basis, ensuring feedback loops are working for all parties and information is flowing freely both into and out of the Bureau and these companies. It is essential that Congress and the public understand this crucial census operation, and both the Bureau and social media companies play a key role. To that end, please address the following questions:

- What processes and procedures has the Bureau developed for ensuring information sharing and feedback between the Bureau's Trust and Safety team and social media companies to help combat disinformation and misinformation, including:
 - a. processes and procedures for sharing useful information and analysis about observed disinformation and misinformation; and
 - b. processes and procedures for coordinating public communications with these companies, to ensure timely and organized responses to disinformation and misinformation threats?
- Does the Bureau plan to inform the public about measures they can take to combat misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms? If so, how?
- Does the Bureau plan to train civil society organizations, state and local governments, or other partners on combatting and flagging misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms?

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Thank you for your attention to this request and your ongoing efforts to ensure we have a complete and accurate census.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gary C. Peters". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

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