

**Testimony of N. Charles Anderson
President & Chief Executive Officer
Urban League of Detroit & Southeastern Michigan**

**U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs
Field Hearing on “Reviewing The 2020 Census: Local Perspectives in Michigan”**

**Detroit, Michigan
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Chairman Peters, thank you for this opportunity to testify today on *Reviewing the 2020 Census: Local Perspectives in Michigan*. Specifically, thank you for bringing the focus of the Census home to Michigan, which unfortunately and regrettably lost a Congressional seat following the 2020 Census. I do want to also thank Mayor Mike Duggan for advocating for a complete count of Detroit and formally challenging our Census Bureau's 2020 numbers. I am honored to be part of this witness panel of outstanding leaders, experts, and community organizers who continually strive to make the state of Michigan and the city of Detroit an international metropolis that serves the need of all of its residents.

As noted, I am N. Charles Anderson, and I have the privilege of serving as the President & Chief Executive Officer of the Urban League of Detroit & Southeastern Michigan. Our organization is a long-time member of the Michigan and Detroit community, having been founded in 1916, over 106 years ago. In my role, my most important job is serving the community and working on behalf of the citizens of Detroit, especially those in marginalized communities, to offer the resources, support, and representation they deserve in partnership with many organizations with the same intent and purpose.

The Urban League of Detroit & Southeastern Michigan is one of the 92 affiliates of the National Urban League across 36 states and the District of Columbia. The Urban League movement serves almost 2 million people *per year* and enables and empowers African Americans and others in underserved communities to achieve their highest human potential and secure economic self-reliance, parity, power, and civil rights. I'm proud to say that the Detroit Urban League is serving more than 13,000 citizens each month, more than 125,000 annually here in Southeastern Michigan.

As part of our mission, the National Urban League convened the 2020 Census Black Roundtable with over 20 national civil rights organizations to organize and strategize ahead of the many obstacles that threaten an accurate count of Black people in this country and, in turn, the essential resources they need.

Over the years, in past annual Censuses, it has been a real privilege to partner with the U.S. government to conduct the Census. The 2020 Census effort did not feel like a truly friendly effort. The Urban League movement absolutely applauds the U.S. Census Bureau's rank and file career staff in the Chicago region, under the leadership of Regional Director, Marilyn Saunders, for their efforts at completing the census in Michigan, especially under unheralded political interference and a global pandemic that is still wreaking havoc on the lives of many, including in

the city of Detroit. The Chicago Regional Office and the Census Bureau as a whole were still able to carry out the constitutional mandate requiring a national count of the U.S. population once every decade. State-level data does not indicate a statistically significant overcount or undercount for the state of Michigan.¹

In coalition with our partners, the Urban League of Detroit and Southeast Michigan was able to join in with other national, state and local support to create infrastructure including public-private partnerships that included numerous volunteers and organizations, and a vast communication apparatus to ensure the fair and accurate count of Detroiters leading up to the official counting. There were over 100 organizations statewide that met regularly to prepare ahead of the Census Campaign because we understood how detrimental the financial impact would be for another undercount in our beloved city.

For example, we engaged with the Detroit Regional Chamber to encourage business operators and customers. Additionally, we worked with countless organizations like the Michigan Nonprofit Association, businesses, and community organization such as grocery stores, utility offices, faith-based community centers, drug stores, and movie theaters to have over 30 Census kiosks in seven districts across the city where residents could easily complete the Census in 5-10 minutes as they went about their daily business and activities.

Considering that Detroit has a disproportionate number of communities that are often hard to reach (i.e., people without internet access, low-income households, people with disabilities, people of color, undocumented immigrants, people who don't speak English and members of the LGBT community, homeless and housing insecure people and families), we secured hundreds of Detroit-based Census workers, volunteers, and nonprofit organizations who knew their neighborhoods and would be trusted by their community, especially in the midst of a global pandemic. Over 100 events were held to get people to sign up to support the Census count.

We cannot overstate the manpower that was required to reach every dwelling in every section of the city, especially during a time when the Detroit Office went from having five local census offices to one and the regional office was relocated from Detroit to Chicago. The Detroit 2020 Census Campaign had over 12 community groups canvass in Detroit areas of low response (they knocked on over 300,000 doors in the city).²

We called on all available resources, with some extra focus on the use of social media. We worked with a variety of media outlets from the Michigan Chronicle, Bridge Magazine, Detroit Free Press and Detroit News, as well as other language media organizations to counter the misinformation and disinformation about the confidentiality of the Census data and it being shared with government agencies and law enforcement.

¹ D'Vera Cohn & Jeffrey S. Passel, *Key Facts About the Quality of the 2020 Census* (Jun. 8, 2022), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/06/08/key-facts-about-the-quality-of-the-2020-census/>.

² Zhodas Orisbayev, *Census Faces Challenges in Michigan, Particularly in the North* (Oct. 2, 2020, 7:26 pm), <https://www.lansingcitypulse.com/stories/census-faces-challenges-in-michigan-particularly-in-the-north,15036>.

In addition, we incorporated social media kits that included campaigns with trusted sources encouraging the completion of the Census. Victoria Kovari, who Mayor Duggan appointed as Detroit 2020 Census Campaign’s executive director, reported that almost \$1 million was spent to place ads in social, digital and traditional media to promote the importance of the census to communities. This was significantly more than the amount spent in the last decennial count.

Even with these unprecedented efforts, there were still significant undercounts of the Black community and other marginalized communities in Detroit. The Census acknowledges the undercounts for Black and Hispanic populations, and American Indian populations residing on reservations. The 2020 Census Black undercount of 3.3 percent exceeded the previous 2010 Black undercount of 2.06 percent.^{3 4}

The Urban League of Detroit & Southeastern Michigan and the National Urban League have grave concerns about the City of Detroit's undercount. More substate data on undercounted communities are needed from the Census Bureau to help local elected officials identify with precision which communities have the greatest need. The Census Bureau's provision of state-level undercount data only hinders the ability of service providers, like the Urban League and our local elected officials and community partners, to allocate sparse resources to significantly undercounted households and families who are hurting the most from structural inequities exacerbated by COVID-19.

While we don’t have data on the undercount, and we understand the Census Bureau does not intend to release data at the substate level at this time, many of the groups historically undercounted are similar to the groups in Detroit, such as a large Black population, immigrant population, young children, incarcerated individuals, those in multiple-family dwellings, and those with limited broadband access. More than 75% of the Detroit population is Black, with a growing immigrant population, and our community is diverse in the country of birth, language, and socioeconomic characteristics.^{5 6}

While Detroit is celebrated as an international, diverse, and vibrant mecca, it is sadly a tale of two cities with the haves and have nots, which was made more visible by COVID-19. In a Brookings report, authors found that “in Detroit, Black people represent over 75 percent of known COVID-19 diagnoses by race and nearly 90 percent of deaths.”⁷

³ *Census Bureau Releases Estimates of Undercount and Overcount in the 2020 Census* (Mar. 10, 2022), <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2022/2020-census-estimates-of-undercount-and-overcount.html>.

⁴ Mike Schneider, *WATCH: U.S. Census Bureau Releases Undercount of Minority Groups in 2020 Census* (Mar. 10, 2022, 10:13 am), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-live-u-s-census-bureau-releases-undercount-data-from-2020-census>.

⁵ Valerie Lacarte, *Black Immigrants in the United States Face Hurdles, but Outcomes Vary by City*, MIGRATION POL’Y INST. (Feb. 10, 2022), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/black-immigrants-united-states-hurdles-outcomes-top-cities>.

⁶ Migration Pol’y Inst., *Data Hub, State Immigration Data Profiles, MI*, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/MI>.

⁷ Rashawn Ray et al., *Examining and Addressing COVID-19 Racial Disparities in Detroit*, BROOKINGS INST. (Mar. 2, 2021), https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Detroit_Covid_report_final.pdf.

⁸ These racial disparities in COVID-19 impacts are not surprising given the long-standing racial inequities in health care, education inequities from preschool through postsecondary, high unemployment rates of Black people, especially males, poverty rates, housing and food insecurity and continuing incarceration of young Black men. These disparities are only further perpetuated by an undercount of these populations.

For example, the undercount has a disastrous impact on young children, who are vastly undercounted in the Census even after concentrating on counting this often-forgotten group.⁹ Over 50% of children in Detroit live in poverty and receive free lunch and childcare subsidies while dealing with potentially lifelong health challenges, including being born with low birth weight, tested for lead, and hospitalized for asthma.¹⁰ These rates are significantly higher in Detroit than in the rest of the state. These disparities contribute to the opportunity gap that we must close to ensure that *all* children can reach their potential regardless of race, place, and class.¹¹

This undercount also has severe economic consequences affecting Black and Brown households in Detroit, Michigan, and nationwide. The National Urban League has called for a congressional hearing in Washington, DC, so that the public and elected leaders can understand the implications of the 2020 Census undercount nationwide--especially federal funding shortfalls.

Given the post-COVID economic needs of our community and the anticipated loss of federal funding over the next 10 years until the 2030 Census, Detroit is slated to lose billions of dollars that could be used to rebuild our infrastructure, housing, schools, healthcare, and address other societal and economic needs. Since the last decade, Detroit has been on a much need path of revitalization and regrowth. A poor census count directly undermines our growth and economic security – setting our progress back, especially for those from marginalized communities.

As Mayor Duggans has previously stated following the University of Michigan's extensive research on Detroit's 2020 Census undercount¹² last year, the projected *8 percent* undercount of Detroit's population following the 2020 Census creates "disastrous financial consequences" for the city. Due to the Census undercount, the Urban League of Detroit & Southeastern Michigan and other local nonprofit service providers will need to address these shortfalls with increased services and programming.

⁸ Rashawn Ray et al., *Examining and Addressing COVID-19 Racial Disparities in Detroit*, BROOKINGS INST. (Mar. 2, 2021), https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Detroit_Covid_report_final.pdf.

⁹ William P. O'Hare, *The Undercount of Young Black Children in the U.S. Census*, COUNT ALL KIDS (Mar. 2020), <https://countallkids.org/resources/the-undercount-of-young-black-children-in-the-u-s-census/>.

¹⁰ Michigan League For Pub. Pol'y, *2020 Kids Count in Michigan Data Profiles, Kids Count, Archive*, <https://mlpp.org/2020kidscount/detroit.pdf> (last visited Jul. 11, 2022).

¹¹ Dolores Acevedo-Garcia et al., *The Child Opportunity Gap: Inequities in Child Opportunity Within Metros*, BRANDEIS UNIV., HELLER SCH. FOR SOC. POL'Y AND MGMT. (Dec. 17, 2019), <https://www.diversitydatakids.org/research-library/data-visualization/child-opportunity-gap>.

¹² Patrick Cooney et al., *Analysis of the Census 2020 Count in Detroit*, UNIV. OF MICHIGAN, GERALD R. FORD SCH. OF PUB. POL'Y, POVERTY SOLUTIONS (Dec. 2021), <http://sites.fordschool.umich.edu/poverty2021/files/2021/12/PovertySolutions-Census-Undercount-in-Detroit-PolicyBrief-December2021.pdf>.

The Black community, in particular, must shoulder the burden of an undercount for the next 10 years, which it has been doing since 1790, when we were counted as three-fifths of a person.¹³ The Urban League will and must continue to fight for accurate data, including a corrected Census to address anticipated funding shortfalls and gaps.

Beyond the inequitable distribution of over \$1.5T in federal funding over the next 10 years, there are political consequences of an undercount. Detroit and the State of Michigan have already felt the political repercussions of a Census undercount through the loss of a congressional seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Statewide, we are waiting to see how Detroit is going to be impacted with how state senate and house seats are going to fall out.

The Urban League urges the Census Bureau to identify opportunities to correct the numbers to reflect an accurate count of our community so that federal funding needs are addressed. Moreover, we urge the Census Bureau to extend broad flexibility in reviewing local challenges to the 2020 Census count, including the acceptance of alternative local data previously not eligible for "challenge" consideration such as, local utility hook-ups and school enrollment numbers.

Finally, the Detroit & Southeastern Michigan Urban League also has concerns with prison gerrymandering. Michigan has an incarceration rate of 599 per 100,000 people (including prisons, jails, immigration detention, and juvenile justice facilities). Our country locks up a higher percentage of its population than almost any democracy on earth. This prison industrial complex is felt especially hard by the Black community, who make up 14% of the state population for over 50% of those imprisoned.¹⁴ ¹⁵ One in 68 Black people are imprisoned in Michigan, and arguably many are from the Detroit metro region.

Given that many prisons are built in rural, primarily white communities, it is concerning when Black people, especially Black men, are not counted in their home district, reducing the political representation of an already marginalized community. The Urban League of Detroit & Southeastern Michigan takes this opportunity to encourage Michigan legislators to pass legislation that abolishes prison gerrymandering, similar to Illinois and other states (California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Virginia, and Washington State) that correct their Census data by creating special state-level censuses that collect the home addresses of people in prison and then adjust the U.S. Census counts prior to redistricting.¹⁶

¹³ Nat'l Urb. League, *Historic Census Undercount of Black Americans Robs Communities of Billions in Funding and Fair Political Representation* (Jul. 6, 2022), <https://nul.org/news/historic-census-undercount-of-black-americans-robs-communities>.

¹⁴ Prison Policy Initiative, *Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Prisons and Jails in Michigan*, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/MI.html> (last visited: Jul. 11, 2022).

¹⁵ Ashley Nellis, *The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons*, THE SENT'G PROJECT (2021), <https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-Color-of-Justice-Racial-and-Ethnic-Disparity-in-State-Prisons.pdf>.

¹⁶ PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE: PRISON GERRYMANDERING PROJECT, *Solutions*, <https://www.prisonersofthecensus.org/solutions.html> (last visited: Jul. 11, 2022).

As we review and seek to address many of the issues in the 2020 Census, the Urban League of Detroit & Southeastern Michigan will continue to address the digital divide for our rural and poor Black communities and the language needs for our increasingly diverse Black and Brown immigrant communities. We will also continue to engage with the ACS and population estimates in preparation for the next Decennial Census in 2030; ensure there are adequate resources for hiring and training of staff (e.g., enumerators); and continued engagement of a multi-racial coalition at the regional, state, and local level to ensure the accurate count of Black and Brown communities, especially young Black children and Black men.

Thank you again, Senator Peters, for the opportunity to bring local attention to Michigan's successes and opportunities for improvement in the fair and accurate counting of Michiganders. I look forward to answering your questions.