

## TESTIMONY OF

### THE HONORABLE MICHAEL E. DUGGAN MAYOR, CITY OF DETROIT

#### **“Reviewing the 2020 Census: Local Perspectives in Michigan” Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs July 25, 2022**

Good morning, Chairman Peters. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today, and I ask that my full written statement be entered into the record.

Tens of thousands of Detroiters were not counted in the 2020 Census. This is not my *opinion*; it's a *fact*. The *fact* of this undercount has been documented by a research team led by experts at the University of Michigan and Wayne State University. Through their efforts, we've confirmed that the 2020 Census failed to count thousands of homes in the City and the people living in them. And even when they did count a house, in an extraordinary number of cases, they wrongly determined that it was vacant.

It didn't have to be that way: all sorts of red flags let the Census Bureau know that it was poised to undercount Detroit. But the Bureau failed to heed those warnings, and, instead, actually took actions that made things worse.

The undercount of Detroiters has an enormous impact. Since 2010, Detroit has received more than \$3.5 billion annually in federal funding tied directly to the census count. With an undercount in the tens of thousands, Detroit will be short-changed hundreds of millions—or even billions—of federal dollars.

Compounding the problem, under existing Census Bureau rules, there's no effective way to undo the damage. The Census Bureau won't go back to correct the 2020 count no matter how much evidence we present. And they will only make adjustments to future population estimates in very limited circumstances. This is why we come to Congress. It's too late to correct errors in congressional apportionment. But, it just makes sense that when there is solid evidence that the census undercounted Detroit's population—as there is here—that error should be corrected, to ensure that Detroit receives its fair share of public funds.

Here are the facts. The 2020 Census counted 639,111 people in Detroit and 309,913 housing units. We dug into those numbers. Detroit has records of how many houses there are on each City block—records for fire and emergency services, water service, and for building inspections. We update those records when new houses go up, and

when old ones come down. The US Postal Service has records of houses in the City, too.

When we compared our records and the Postal Service's records to the number of housing units the census counted, the difference was shocking. They missed tens of thousands of houses in Detroit. This isn't rocket science: all they had to do was follow the postal carrier and they would have found those homes. I have direct experience with this. In 1980, when I was a student, I worked as a census enumerator in Ann Arbor. You put in the hours, you pound the pavement, you count the people. The 2020 Census simply failed to put in the work in Detroit.

We didn't stop our investigation with administrative records. We looked at actual images of all of the addresses on 2,990 City blocks where there appeared to be an undercount. A team of reviewers from the University of Michigan, Wayne State University, and the City, working with nationally-recognized demographic experts—more than 100 people in total—collectively spent over 5,000 hours examining photographs of 114,274 addresses.

We looked at Google Street View images. We also used street-level imagery from the City's Department of Innovation and Technology, and we used 360-degree aerial imagery from the City's Assessor's Office. We used two images for each address: one closest-in-time before April 1, 2020, and one after—all to determine whether our records, and the Postal Service's records, were right.

Here's what we found. On those 2,990 blocks, the census missed 9,334 habitable housing units—houses and apartments that they just didn't count.

Of course, the census isn't just about counting housing units—it's about counting people. So, we applied the Census Bureau's own vacancy rate for the City to those 9,334 houses. Then, we used the Census Bureau's City-wide average for the number of people living in a housing unit, which is just under two and a half. Taking this very conservative approach, the 2020 Census missed *at least* 18,900 people in Detroit.<sup>1</sup>

But, the real number is much higher.

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<sup>1</sup> The City of Detroit's March 30, 2022 Count Question Resolution ("CQR") submission and June 30, 2022 Supplemental CQR submission, which document the City's housing count analysis and conclusions, are attached to this testimony as Exhibits 1 and 2, respectively.

First, we examined only a portion of the city blocks with housing units on them. We have finite resources, and limited time. But I have every reason to believe there were thousands of houses missed elsewhere.

Second, and just as important, we know that in many Detroit neighborhoods the 2020 Census significantly over-stated the vacancy rate for the houses they did count. Professor Jeff Morenoff from the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan will talk about this in more detail later. His research team looked at the 2020 Census count of *occupied* housing units in Detroit, going door-to-door in five neighborhoods to count how many houses were occupied, and additionally reviewing Postal Service records in five additional neighborhoods. They found that the census undercounted the number of occupied housing units in those neighborhoods by more than 8%. They concluded that “if undercounts of a similar magnitude [were] found in a majority of the City’s more than 600 block groups, the ultimate size of a potential undercount could be in the tens of thousands.”<sup>2</sup>

We also took a step back from the detailed work of documenting missed housing units neighborhood by neighborhood to look at the bigger picture. At the start of the Local Update of Census Addresses (“LUCA”) operation in 2018, there were 368,417 residential addresses in Detroit, according to the Census Bureau. Detroit participated in the LUCA program, submitting addresses to add and delete from the Bureau’s Master Address File. At the end of the LUCA process in 2019, there were just over 385,000 addresses for Detroit in the Bureau’s Master Address File.

Fast forward through 2020, the census year. In August 2021, the Bureau released detailed population and housing unit counts in its Redistricting Data File. The numbers for Detroit were shocking: the address count for the City was only 309,913.

So, I ask the Census Bureau: how did we “lose” 58,000 residential addresses between the start of LUCA in 2018 and the end of the 2020 Census? When, and how, did those tens of thousands of addresses disappear from the enumeration universe?

Our start-to-finish numbers paint a stark picture of the problem for Detroit: where did those housing units go? We would be grateful for answers from the Census Bureau to these questions, and we welcome the committee’s assistance in facilitating that exchange of information.

There’s one question, however, that’s no mystery: *why* did this happen? It happened because the Census Bureau failed to provide enough resources in Detroit to do the

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<sup>2</sup> The University of Michigan report is attached as Exhibit M to the City’s March 30, 2022 CQR submission.

job right, and they ended the count prematurely. We saw this coming and sounded the alarm long before the numbers were reported, but our pleas fell on deaf ears.

The 2020 Census was the first time the Bureau began the count by prioritizing online internet self-response. From the outset, it was obvious that internet self-response would present a serious obstacle in Detroit, one of the “least-connected” big cities in the country. It was no surprise, then, that Detroit’s self-response rate was dead last among the 50 largest cities in the United States.

But, in August of 2020, when self-response was only 48.8% in Detroit compared to 77.2% in neighboring Oakland County, the Census Bureau actually started its field activities in Oakland County *before* Detroit. To make matters worse, after first admitting that COVID-19 necessitated an extended timeline for completing the count, then-Commerce Secretary Ross reversed course and ended all counting operations early—on October 15th.

As a result, enumerators had only 50 days to count over half the homes in Detroit. And during those 50 days the Bureau refused to devote enough resources to the City.

Here are just a few examples of the Bureau’s mishandling of the Detroit count:

- From early July until August 30, 2020—the critical period for field operations in Detroit—the Detroit Area Census Office had no director.
- Despite the clear need, census enumerators who offered to work in Detroit were turned away. Mary Kovari, an educator and census enumerator, said: “By late August, the work in Oakland County began to slow down. On three separate occasions I volunteered to work in Detroit, but I was never assigned any cases to work.”
- Census supervisors actually diverted enumerators *away* from the City. Josh Samson, a census enumerator, said: “Instead of being sent to Detroit, I was assigned to areas all over the state . . . I was [also] offered a \$500 bonus to travel to another state to work, but I never got a call back about working in Detroit.”
- Clois Foster, a retired postal worker and census enumerator, added: “They even asked me to go out of state. How can I go out of state when my own City is not being counted?”
- As the counting process drew to its premature close, some enumerators who remained in Detroit were not assigned any additional work. Brenda Jett, a

retired Detroit Public schoolteacher told us: “Near the end of the count, the case assignment list was not being updated . . . I did not receive any new case assignments for the last 5 days before the count ended.”

- Enumerator Josh Samson summed up: “I took my job seriously and did not want the citizens of Michigan to be undercounted. The entire process was a mess.”<sup>3</sup>

This must be corrected.

Detroit is pursuing all administrative remedies currently available, but the Census Bureau’s procedures are too limited to provide meaningful relief. For example, the City filed a Count Question Resolution submission, challenging the undercount of housing units in the City. But that program only addresses geographic coding issues and “processing errors” that resulted in incorrect housing counts. There’s much more than a “processing error” here.

At a minimum, the City’s population count needs to be corrected in the Census Bureau’s annual population estimates going forward. But here again there are obstacles.

First, in decades past, the so-called “Population Estimates Challenge Program” allowed cities to challenge an incorrect population estimate beginning in the year following the decennial census. This year, the Bureau has delayed implementation of that program, preventing challenges to the 2021 estimates.

Second, the rules governing the program following the 2010 Census were so narrowly written that they prevented real adjustments, even when a challenge was backed by compelling evidence. It is time for the Bureau to adopt a much more robust challenge program. At least three issues should be addressed:

- (1) cities should be allowed to challenge the population “base” used for the annual estimates, especially with respect to housing vacancy rates and person-per-household figures;
- (2) the “county cap” that artificially restricts adjustments to a city’s population should be eliminated; and
- (3) cities should be allowed to challenge the “change components” used in the population estimate with the best available administrative data.

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<sup>3</sup> Signed statements from eleven census enumerators and staff are attached as Exhibits B – L of the City’s March 30, 2022 CQR submission.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for asking the Senate Appropriations Committee to include report language with the Fiscal Year 2023 appropriations bill that funds the Census Bureau, urging the Bureau to improve and expand the Population Estimates Challenge Program. The House Appropriations Committee recently adopted the language, and we are hopeful that the Senate committee will do the same.<sup>4</sup>

We know we can't go back and fix the 2020 Census or replace hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding already lost, but we hope that, with your help, the Census Bureau will take positive steps to give our City much needed relief going forward. At a minimum, Detroit needs the Bureau to implement a more robust Population Estimates Challenge Program—*this year*—to correct the City's population for future estimates, ensuring Detroit receives its fair share of federal funds.

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<sup>4</sup> The report language in the House Appropriations Committee Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 2023 states: "The Committee is concerned over the accuracy of the 2020 Decennial Census and the impact the Department's unprecedented engagement in technical matters with the Census Bureau during the years leading up to the 2020 Decennial may have had on the efficacy of response rates. The Committee directs a briefing from the Census Bureau, in coordination with the Scientific Integrity Task Force, no later than 45 days after enactment of this Act on steps it is taking to minimize interference in the 2030 Decennial Census. Additionally, the Committee recognizes that pandemic-related disruptions to the 2020 Decennial Census operations may have resulted in significant undercounts in some localities. The Committee notes that decennial census counts are the basis for annual population estimates that are used to distribute Federal resources, and therefore, those estimates should be as accurate as possible. As the Census Bureau reinstates the Population Estimates Challenge Program this decade, the Census Bureau should consider more flexible methodologies and broader use of administrative data to ensure meaningful opportunities to improve the accuracy of the estimates, including appropriate improvements to the estimates base. Additionally, the Committee directs GAO to review the Census Bureau's efforts and brief the Committee within 180 days of the Census Bureau completing its related work on the Population Estimates Challenge Program."