



Advocates for Children and Youth improves the lives and experiences of Maryland's children and youth by advancing policies and programs across multiple issue areas that tackle racial disparities and improve outcomes to ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Testimony before the 2020 Census Grant Program Panel

February 8, 2019

Advocates for Children and Youth commends this Panel for its work to ensure that Maryland has a robust and accurate census count in 2020. We understand that the Panel has an important and time-sensitive mission and appreciate your service and the diligence with which you have approached the work. We also recognize that the Panel has begun its work and is moving quickly, but we wanted to raise two issues that are important for the Panel to consider as you finalize your decisions.

ACY has been working on issues related to the census with our national partner, the Partnership for America's Children, over the past year. We are participating in Baltimore City's Complete Count Committee and will be reaching out to the Committees in the other central Maryland jurisdictions over the next six months. In full disclosure, ACY is contemplating applying for a grant award. It is important to stress that our comments are not submitted with an intent of favoring any potential application in any way but rather as part of our ongoing work.

Young Children

We appreciate the discussion this Panel has had around reaching hard to count or traditionally under-counted populations. We agree that this is a critical priority, and in order to address it the Program must address the undercount of young children, who are historically the most undercounted age group in the census by a significant margin.

Quoting from the Partnership for America's Children:

"The 2010 Census missed nearly one in ten children aged 0-4, or about 2 million children; the net young child undercount (after eliminating duplications) was nearly 5% or almost one million children. This age group had by far the worst undercount of any age group. This trend of missing young children has been growing over the last several Decennial Censuses even as our ability to count other age groups has improved."¹

The undercount of young children compounds the undercount of other populations, because the children that are missed are disproportionately children of color and children living in

¹ <https://countallkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Partnership-For-Americas-Children-Comments-on-the-Census.pdf>

poverty. However, young children are missed for different reasons than other hard to count populations; for that reason, specific strategies and messaging must be deployed.

In four out of five cases young children were missed because they were not counted even when someone living in their household has completed the form. This often happens because children live in large households, or in complicated living arrangements, and while some people in the household are counted the young children are missed. There is wide-spread confusion around who should be counted, which is compounded when language barriers exist, as those completing the form may not understand they should count all children in the household.

This means that the approach to count young children must be different than that usually used to count adults. Specifically, the Census Bureau focuses on areas where few people return the forms, and their messages are designed to persuade them to return the form. However, young children may live in areas with high response rates, and the messages to ensure they are counted need to make it clear that everyone, particularly young children, must be counted.

We encourage this Panel to consider young children specifically as a targeted population when designing the grant request and the rubric. More information, including resources and a conversation about how funders can prioritize young children in the census, is available at countallkids.org. The Count All Kids project is also developing a metric to help identify areas where young children are at risk of being missed, and outreach materials based on communications research focusing on families with young children. We encourage the Panel to distribute these materials to all groups that are funded to do outreach; they will be available in early summer 2019.

Trusted Messengers and Completion

Given the shift at the national level to a more online-based response system, we believe the focus on get out the count efforts cannot just be on raising awareness but, as mentioned above, must include completion of the forms. This focus would also assist with the young child undercount, as completion efforts could focus on reporting all children in the household. As such, we encourage this Panel to prioritize funding efforts that would not just utilize broad marketing or awareness raising but focus specifically on personal interactions and assistance with completing the forms.

We were very encouraged by the observations made at the January 18th hearing about ensuring that the entities doing outreach to be reflective of, and rooted in, the communities and constituencies that are traditionally harder to count. We encourage the Panel to continue thinking of requirements that would probe an organization's history of outreach with the targeted populations; the organization's ability to relate to and build trust with those populations; and whether organization's staff and leadership are reflective of the targeted populations.

To ensure that the organizations receiving funding are able to reach the targeted populations may require that smaller, community-based organizations and entities are able to apply for this funding. Structuring the program in a way that allows smaller, less established organizations to participate – such as lump sum payments and allowing fiscal sponsors and/or passthrough grants – is important. The Panel could encourage groups to partner and should ensure that

some portion of the funds awarded are going to smaller, community based groups. We also strongly encourage the Panel to disburse grants, particularly small grants, in a timely and streamlined manner, understanding that smaller organizations may be cash-strapped and need funds in a timely manner to engage in promotion or hiring of new staff.

Conclusion

Again, we thank the Panel for its diligence on this important matter. It is clear that the Panel members are well aware of the critical nature of the census and the funding implications of an undercount. We appreciate your service and encourage you to see ACY and the Partnership as a resource in this effort.