

February 15, 2018

The Honorable Wilbur Ross  
Secretary of Commerce  
U.S. Commerce Department  
1401 Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

On behalf of the 10 undersigned Jewish organizations, we urge you to reject the Department of Justice's harmful request to add a new citizenship question to the 2020 Census. This additional question is unnecessary and would fundamentally threaten the integrity and accuracy of the decennial census, with wide-ranging implications for our nation.

If the Census Bureau were to grant the Department of Justice's request, it raises the likelihood of suppressing response rates from immigrant and other minority communities. From the ban on entry of immigrants from Muslim-majority countries to the termination of DACA, America's immigrant communities feel increasingly vulnerable. A new Census question about citizenship will raise fears about such information now or in the future being used against them or their loved ones. This will potentially lower Census response rates and undermine the Census's accuracy.

Depressed Census participation would have far reaching consequences, as the data gathered by the Census is relied upon to allocate federal funding and determine congressional representation. If communities with large immigrant populations are undercounted by the Census, the government's ability to meet the needs of the American people through the provision of essential services and aid dollars will be thwarted. Further, the interests of immigrant communities would not be accurately represented in Congress if the congressional

apportionment process is based upon flawed data, undermining our representative democracy.

The Justice Department stated that the addition of the citizenship question will facilitate enforcement of the Voting Rights Act. However, the federal government continues to conduct the American Community Survey to obtain estimates of the citizen population, the data from which has been deemed suitable for use in Voting Rights Act enforcement cases. Since the inception of the decennial Census in 1790, it has counted citizens and non-citizens alike. It has not included questions about citizenship since 1960. Moreover, all questions that are included on the Census are carefully designed and tested to ensure that the data collected is accurate. Adding a question to the Census at this stage of the planning process would disrupt preparation and increase costs, in addition to threatening the accuracy of the data.

Throughout history, the Jewish community has valued broad participation in civic life. Even in biblical times, Jewish leaders understood the importance of a fair and accurate census. The Torah tells us that in the wilderness of Sinai, God commanded Moses to take a head count of the people (Numbers 1:2). Our modern-day responsibility to support the engagement of all people in the life and well-being of our communities is no less significant.

Historically, the Census has undercounted people of color and immigrants. We urge you not to compound this problem and, instead, protect the integrity of the 2020 Census by rejecting the Department of Justice's request to add a question about citizenship.

If you have any questions or wish to discuss this further, please contact Rabbi Jonah Pesner, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, at [jpesner@rac.org](mailto:jpesner@rac.org) or 202-387-2800.

Sincerely,

Anti-Defamation League  
Bend the Arc Jewish Action  
Central Conference of American Rabbis  
Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.  
Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
Jewish Federations of North America  
Jewish Women International

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger  
National Council of Jewish Women  
Union for Reform Judaism