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Reform Judaism
Service Employees International Union
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UnidosUS

President and CEO

Maya Wiley

June 25, 2025

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 240 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States, our Census Task Force co-chairs, Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC and NALEO Educational Fund, and the undersigned organizations, we write to express our deep concern about the U.S. Census Bureau's ability to conduct a critical test next year in preparation for the 2030 Census. Known as the 2026 Census Test, this test will allow the Census Bureau to research and test new operations and outreach methods. The federal hiring freeze, coupled with delayed and uncertain funding for both the current and next fiscal years, could force the Census Bureau to curtail or cancel altogether the six field sites, as well as the nationally-representative sample, planned for the 2026 Census Test. The bureau must decide soon how to proceed, as preparations must begin this summer. **Accordingly, we ask Congress to intervene *now* to ensure that the full complement of test activities can proceed as planned, to help make sure the 2030 Census counts all communities accurately.**

The undersigned organizations represent a broad range of census stakeholders, from businesses and nonprofits, to local governments and scientific associations, to civil rights organizations and researchers, clearly demonstrating the urgency of addressing this immediate threat to a fair, useful, and accurate 2030 Census. The decennial census—the first responsibility of the federal government, and Congress specifically, in the U.S. Constitution—takes more than a full decade to plan and implement. Because Census Day (April 1) is set by law and the Constitution mandates a census every 10 years, the Census Bureau cannot postpone research and testing for the decennial census.

Modern counting methods can help increase accuracy and contain overall costs, goals that Congress supports on a bipartisan basis. Through 2027, the bureau must test and refine new methods and operations before it conducts a full Dress Rehearsal in 2028. The window of opportunity to research improvements that will reduce persistent, disproportionate undercounts in rural areas, low-income neighborhoods, and American Indian, Black, Hispanic, and other historically undercounted communities will close soon.

The consequences of canceling or curtailing the 2026 Census Test are not theoretical. In the last decennial cycle, Congress failed to meet the administration's funding request for 2020 Census planning in Fiscal Years 2012-2017. This insufficient funding led the Census Bureau to cancel every planned test in rural areas and on American Indian reservations, including two of three dress rehearsal sites in 2018. The lone site of the 2018 dress rehearsal

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was also significantly downscaled. As a result, the bureau was not adequately prepared to carry out the 2020 Census.

Canceling or scaling back the 2026 Census Field Test may result in increased costs for the decennial census. During the 2020 census cycle, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) noted that the cancellation of the 2017 field test and the scaling back of the 2018 End-to-End Test due to budget constraints led to missed opportunities for identifying and resolving operational issues.¹ Without comprehensive testing across various geographic locations and demographic groups, the Census Bureau faces greater risks of errors and inefficiencies during the actual census, which can ultimately drive up costs. Furthermore, the GAO's 2020 report highlighted that untested procedures implemented due to compressed timelines, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, led to increased costs and compromised data quality.² These findings show that scaling back or canceling field tests limits the bureau's ability to refine operations in advance, leading to more costly corrective actions during the decennial census.

After the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau's evaluation of its own work showed a net undercount of 5.64 percent on American Indian reservations, and a net undercount of 2.58 percent in areas counted using the "Update/Leave" method, primarily used in rural communities. Further, the bureau also was unable to test new methods to count group facilities (e.g., college dorms, prisons, and nursing homes) electronically, instead falling back on more costly, time-consuming, and less accurate paper-based procedures. The Census Bureau currently plans to test updated methods again in 2026.

With the clock winding down on the Census Bureau's ability to move forward with a comprehensive 2026 Census Test, we urge you to take the following time-sensitive actions:

- 1. Call on the administration to lift the federal hiring freeze immediately with respect to all positions needed to finish planning, preparations, and implementation of the 2026 Census Test.**
- 2. Direct the Secretary of Commerce to allocate sufficient funds for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2025 for full implementation of the 2026 Census Test nationally and in the six selected field sites.³**

In addition, we strongly urge Congress to allocate sufficient funding in Fiscal Year 2026 to ensure a successful 2026 test with meaningful results that can guide final 2030 Census planning, without sacrificing the quality of other vital Census Bureau economic and demographic statistical programs. Your active support to achieve this goal is critical. Congress must invest **now** in comprehensive testing and ongoing partnerships with local governments, trusted nonprofits, and businesses to make sure new

¹ Goldenkoff, Robert & Powner, David A. "2020 Census: Continued Management Attention Needed to Mitigate Key Risks Jeopardizing a Cost-Effective and Secure Enumeration." April 18, 2018. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-18-416t.pdf>.

² GAO. "2020 Census: Recent Decision to Compress Census Timeframes Poses Additional Risks to an Accurate Count." August 2020. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-671r.pdf>.

³ Article I, section 2, clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution gives Congress the authority to "direct" how the census shall be taken.

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methods are sound, effective, and cost-efficient.

Thank you again for your timely attention to this critical issue and request. If you have any questions, please contact Meeta Anand, senior program director of census and data equity at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, at anand@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
NALEO Educational Fund

American Atheists
American Civil Liberties Union
American Statistical Association
Arab American Institute (AAI)
Arkansas Black Gay Men's Forum
Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote)
Association of Population Centers
Basic Rights Oregon
Caring Across Generations
Catalyst of San Diego & Imperial Counties
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF)
Coalition on Human Needs
Colorado Civic Engagement Roundtable
CommunicationFIRST
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Consortium of Social Science Associations
COOLJC Region 8 SJEREC
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)
Economic Policy Institute
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)
Equality California
EveryLibrary Institute NFP
Fair Count Inc
Fairness Campaign
Fayetteville Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
Generations United
Georgia Federation of Democratic Women
Gerontological Society of America
Government Information Watch
Hunger Free Vermont
Impact Fund

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Insights Association
Japanese American Citizens League
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
MACS 2030 - Minnesotans for the ACS and 2030 Census
Maine Children's Alliance
MANA, A National Latina Organization
Michigan Association of Planning, the Michigan Chapter of the American Planning Association
Movement Advancement Project
Multicultural Council of America
N.Y. Elections, Census & Redistricting Institute
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Community Development Association
National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Urban League
National Women's Law Center
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
Population Association of America
Prison Policy Initiative
Project On Government Oversight
PROMO Missouri
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
Public Justice Center
RLS Demographics, Inc.
SER National Inc.
Silver State Equality
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Southern Poverty Law Center
The Karabelle Pizzigati Initiative in Advocacy for Children, Youth and Families at the University of Maryland
Urban and Regional Information Systems Association
Vitalyst Health Foundation
VOICES for Alabama's Children
Voto Latino