WHAT IS AT STAKE FOR CONNECTICUT?

Every ten years, the federal government seeks to count every person in the country through the decennial Census. Insufficient federal funding for Census preparations, controversy over a proposed citizenship question, and a switch from paper to online surveys present new challenges for the 2020 Census. The accuracy of the Census will have an impact on Connecticut for the next ten years.

- Our quality of life and billions in federal funding. The 2020 Census count will determine how much federal funding states and localities will receive over the next decade. In Fiscal Year 2016, Connecticut received $10.7 billion through 55 large, Census-guided, federal spending programs that support the education, housing, health care, transportation, and other needs of state residents.
- Fair and accurate apportionment of legislative seats. Connecticut’s state constitution requires that Congressional and state legislative districts be redrawn every ten years based on Census data.
- Well-informed planning and economic development. State and local governments, as well as businesses, need accurate Census data to understand and respond to community needs and make informed decisions.

RESIDENTS AT RISK OF AN UNDERCOUNT

When some age, racial, and ethnic groups are undercounted, the communities where they live lose out on funding, resources, and political representation.

- Young children under 5 are the age group most likely to be undercounted nationally, with 4.6% in the U.S. and 3.3% in Connecticut going uncounted in 2010.
- Additional populations that are more vulnerable to an undercount include Black persons; Hispanic persons; renters; low-income residents; persons who do not speak English fluently; undocumented immigrants; homeless persons; young mobile persons; persons who are angry at and/or distrust the government; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) persons.
- Since this is the first Census that can be completed online, people without internet access at home will face barriers to completing the survey.

Many demographic groups who are at risk of an undercount live in “hard-to-count” Census tracts that had low response rates to the mailed Census form in 2010.

- More than one in five (22%) Connecticut residents – about 806,000 – live in these areas.
- More than half of Hispanic (54%) and Black (55%) residents live in hard-to-count tracts, compared to 15% of White residents.
- Half of persons in poverty (50%) and more than half of limited English speaking households (53%) live in these tracts.
- Among all states and the District of Columbia, Connecticut has the 15th highest share of residents in these tracts. It also has the third highest share of Hispanic residents, the fourth highest of Black residents, the third highest share of people in poverty, and the fifth highest share of limited English speaking households in these tracts.
CENSUS 2020 OUTREACH

Connecticut is among the 41 states that have formed statewide Complete Count Census Committees to encourage participation in the 2020 Census. However, Connecticut’s state government has not yet followed the example of at least 21 of these states that also dedicated state funding to Census outreach and the work of these committees. In addition, Connecticut’s Committee has not issued any coordinated plan for outreach.

Four nearby, surrounding states – Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island – have far surpassed Connecticut’s efforts by appropriating funding for Census outreach ranging from $700 thousand to $20 million. To supplement public funding, statewide networks of private philanthropic organizations in these nearby states have also established pooled funds to substantially expand Census outreach activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Connecticut policymakers must act swiftly if the State is to ensure that all Connecticut residents are counted by funding Census outreach. Setting a conservative estimate for Connecticut state government funding of outreach at $1 per person would produce a statewide budget of $3.57 million. The cost of a more aggressive plan of outreach by community-based organizations to the nearly 747,000 state residents who are considered hard-to-count is estimated at $6.16 million.

The Census Bureau will begin mailings to residents about the Census survey in mid-March 2020. Given that this is the first year the Census will be made available electronically, it is important that public education and outreach to promote the Census (as part of a comprehensive statewide plan) begin no later than early-March.

The General Assembly does not return to its regular legislative session until February 5, 2020. Policymakers should act quickly to explore options to fund an outreach campaign in an accelerated timeframe and, with equal urgency, the Connecticut Complete Count Committee should draft a comprehensive statewide plan for Census outreach. The State, General Assembly, and local elected officials should explore the possibility of leveraging Federal Highway Administration matching funds to support Census outreach, as Rhode Island has done.

Additionally, we strongly recommend the following:

• Connecticut policymakers should prioritize funding for community-based organizations with a record of serving hard-to-count populations and hard-to-count Census tracts.
• In addition to targeting hard-to-count areas, the State should identify and prioritize specific strategies to reach and educate households with young children about the importance of including them in Census counts.
• The State should create a public-private partnership that leverages the philanthropic sector to help supplement State funds.
• The General Assembly should take action to end the practice of “prison gerrymandering” by adopting state legislation that counts incarcerated persons as residents of their hometowns for the purpose of legislative redistricting.

With so much at stake for the next decade, our state cannot afford an undercount. A modest investment in outreach could help ensure billions in returns and the funding available to support education, child care, health, housing, transportation, and other programs that our children and families need.