



BRIEF LOOK

An Accurate Census Count is Our Best Prescription

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WHILE THE CORONAVIRUS UPENDING OUR DAILY LIVES, we must not let this public health crisis derail our state's census participation. New York must have an accurate count because it will affect the resources our state has to combat the next health threat or climate crisis.

The census is in part a kind of competition with state counts determining the level of federal investment for the next ten years as well as our state's Congressional representation. An undercount threatens our state with the loss of two seats, which will mute our national voice for years to come. Additionally, organizations like FPI also use census data as the starting point of analysis on issues affecting New Yorkers. Businesses use this information to determine where to open new stores and factories. Local governments and states use this data to plan where hospitals, roads, and senior centers should be built, and census information helps us when preparing for and dealing with public health crises such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Before the onset of this crisis, our state made the census a priority and allocated funding in last year's budget to prepare for the count. Now our task is not to lose track of our commitment in the middle of the chaos and distribute the funds that were already designated for this task.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) are critically important to the census process, as they are the trusted voices with ties to community members who are hesitant or resistant to participating in this once-a-decade survey. With a federal government dedicated to curtailing immigration and a pandemic that will hit those already marginalized, CBOs outreach is critical to achieving a full count of all New Yorkers.

State funding for CBOs is a sound investment in more than just the data that supports federal funding and political representation; ultimately, it's an investment in people. FPI estimated \$40 million was required to support census outreach by these groups. In last year's budget, \$15 million in funding was specifically slated for CBO's conducting census outreach. Unfortunately, these groups are still waiting to receive this much-needed support, leaving our state dangerously ill-equipped to assist community members with census participation. Ensuring that CBOs are adequately funded to do the census outreach must continue to be a state priority.

Assemblymember Robert Rodriguez has called for an additional \$20 million to be spent in the FY 2021 budget specifically for CBO outreach efforts in the census. This would bring our state closer to the estimated \$40 million that FPI found was needed to support groups. During the COVID-19 outbreak, CBOs will need more funds to support creative measures to assist and motivate people to respond to the census survey.

The census is the bedrock of understanding who we are, knowing how we are doing, and ultimately it is the foundation of our democracy. No matter what your political views are, your age, gender, race, or nationality, the census relies on your participation. Ignoring the needs of our community members who were already dealing with the effects of marginalization before the pandemic will hurt us all.

Governor Cuomo and the legislature must prioritize New York's census count in the wake of the pandemic as this is the best prescription for our future health and well-being. This Wednesday, April 1st, is Census day. Let us take this day seriously and support New Yorkers in getting counted.

By Shamier Settle

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