



CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Testimony to the New York State Complete Count Commission
March 11, 2019

Good evening Chairs Malatras and Rosado, and distinguished members of the New York State Complete Count Commission. My name is Rachel Bloom and I am the Director of Public Policy and Programs at Citizens Union, and serve on the steering committee of New York Counts 2020 and as the co-chair of the State and Local Government Committee. We thank you for holding this meeting on census preparation throughout New York, and for giving Citizens Union the opportunity to publicly share our recommendations with you.

Citizens Union is a nonpartisan good government group dedicated to reforming New York City and State governments to foster accessibility, accountability, and transparency. We serve as a civic watchdog, combating corruption and fighting for political reform and the 2020 census is one of our top institutional priorities. New York Counts 2020 is a statewide coalition of over 150 partners working to maximize participation in the 2020 Census. The coalition represents a wide array of issue-focused organizations and industries including immigrant rights, good government, labor, education, religion, health, technology, business, and libraries.

I am pleased to be here tonight representing both of these organizations and am delighted that the New York State Commission has been fully appointed. Everyone in this room shares the same goal, of a fair and accurate count throughout the state of New York. The challenges facing the census are large and numerous – the first digital census, severe funding shortages, only one field test of the census as opposed to the recommended three, and the potential inclusion of an citizenship question, just to name a few. In the face of these challenges, the work before the Commission is more important than ever.

New York State cannot afford an undercount – politically or financially. New York is at risk of losing one to two seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. Also at stake are billions of dollars of federal funds. Every decade New York receives \$800 billion for 16 major programs, of which every New Yorker receives approximately \$2,600 per person per year. These dollars fund key programs like SNAP, HeadStart, and Medicaid. Every dollar the state pays toward ensuring a fair and accurate census count will be paid back in multiples. No New Yorker can afford to be uncounted.

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To help ensure the most complete census count possible, we recommend the following:

- 1) **Adequately fund census operations in New York in the FY20 Budget.** A sizable, yet relatively small portion of the state budget must be allocated toward the 2020 census. To start, we recommend \$40 million be allocated for community-based outreach (CBO). That figure comes from a Fiscal Policy Institute 2018 report. CBO funding used to come from the federal government for this type of outreach, but that funding stream does not exist for the 2020 census and it is imperative that this work be funded by the state. Established organizations in hard to count communities are the best people to do the work of ensuring these communities are counted.

In addition, other budget allocations must be made for census work to be done by the state. There must be adequate and substantial funding for a public education and outreach program in all communities throughout the state, with funding for things like media buys, printing, mailing and translation services.

- 2) **Embrace New York's non-profit community.** New York has the most vibrant non-profit community in the country, and already several hundred organizations have mobilized around the census with more sure to join in. To effectively harness the power of these organizations, clear and accurate information about what the state is planning to do, what gaps will fall to community groups to fill in, and what resources the state will provide are needed.
- 3) **Plan and share information as quickly as possible.** The 2020 census is rapidly approaching, and the work that needs to be undertaken is vast. Organizations, counties and municipalities across the state have been planning and working toward the 2020 census for several years. This Commission must work swiftly to make recommendations and ensure the importance of properly carrying out the census is understood among leadership in Albany.

We thank the Commission for its critical work and consideration of these important recommendations to ensure the full and accurate count of all New Yorkers in the 2020 census. We look forward to working with you over the next year.