

**New York Civic Engagement Table Testimony to Census Commission, SUNY Sullivan
March 20, 2019**

Good Evening Commissioners, my name is Ann Sullivan and I am the Hudson Valley Civic Engagement Coordinator for the New York Civic Engagement Table. The New York Civic Engagement Table brings together over 60 community based, grassroots organizations across issue areas and regions in New York State. We are a shared-resources hub committed to creating a better, more just, and democratic world through year-round civic engagement. Our efforts focus on increasing access to the ballot box, engagement with communities, and full representation through equitable census and redistricting processes and is focused in communities that are typically the hardest to count in New York State.

- Every day, we provide data, tools, and training to community organizations to support civic engagement campaigns and we are adapting these tools for census outreach
- The groups that we work with have extensive experience mobilizing communities with activities including door to door canvassing, phone calls and peer to peer texting. For example, our partners did 1 million non-partisan texts to voters for the 2018 elections. We are adapting this civic engagement infrastructure, training and know-how for census outreach and education.

Our partner organizations care deeply about ensuring that every New Yorker is counted in the 2020 census and are particularly focused on hard-to-count communities who also have a history of low-civic engagement – immigrant communities, low-income communities of color and young people.

The 2020 Census may be one of the most challenging in recent history with 1) the looming possibility of a citizenship question - a question that serves to intimidate immigrant communities, 2) inadequate investment in the Census Bureau from the federal government, and 3) an emphasis on an online response when many community members have limited access to broadband and computers. With these hurdles and the enormity of what is at stake, New York must **invest at least \$40 million for community groups (in addition to funds for state and local government outreach)** to conduct outreach from trusted community messengers to ensure a full and fair count. It is community organizations that knock on doors, talk to their members every single day, have deep relationships in the community and are OF and FROM the community. This kind of outreach will prove critical to making sure every New Yorker is counted and that communities across the state receive the resources and political representation they deserve.

The current federal administration has sown fear and uncertainty in many communities and that, combined with a general hesitancy for many New Yorkers to share information with the federal government, could seriously jeopardize a full and fair count in communities that are often undercounted, especially in communities of color. This is why it is absolutely essential that organizations who are trusted messengers in these communities, play the biggest role possible in maximizing participation in the Census next year. But this will require a significant investment from the state. Other states have already recognized the essential role they must play in ensuring a full count. For example, the state of California is investing \$100 million in census outreach. A report from the Fiscal Policy Institute calculated that it would take \$40 million in this year's state budget for community-based organizations to do outreach around the 2020 Census.

The consequences of undercounting our communities would be dire. According to research done by the George Washington Institute of Public Policy, in FY2016, New York received over \$73 billion through 55 federal spending programs guided by data derived from the 2010 Census. Federal funding, economic development, and fair representation are all at stake with the 2020 census, which is why the state must make the investment now so community-based groups have the opportunity to plan and get the word out early. Next year will be too late. Community groups who have deep and trusted relationships with their constituencies are the best equipped to get the word out about the census and they need the resources NOW in order to be successful. That is why we are urging the state to prioritize making this investment.

At this critical juncture, we are counting on you to take the comments that you have heard so far, from Rochester, from the Bronx and now from the Hudson Valley, seriously. Though your official findings may not be due until the end of May or June, **I hope you will send your preliminary findings to the governor immediately, well before April 1st when the New York State budget is finalized.** The Governor is betraying the people of this state unless he includes Census money in the budget. He has delayed long enough and the consequences are severe.

Thank you for your time this evening. For any questions, please contact Ann Sullivan, ann@nycet.org.