



**Testimony of
Hannah Collins
Community Resource Exchange**

New York State Complete Count Commission

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Hostos Community College, Bronx, New York

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Good evening. My name is Hannah Collins and I serve as Senior Manager of Marketing and Communications at Community Resource Exchange (CRE)

I thank Commission Co-Chair Secretary of State Rosanna Rosado and Commission Members for holding these important public hearings across the state to solicit input from the public about the upcoming Census. It is crucial – as you shape the strategy to ensure a complete count – that you hear from a diverse range of stakeholders. It is clear that, collectively, we all want to ensure a smooth, accurate, and responsible count, which will further strengthen our City and State.

CRE is a Manhattan-based nonprofit that provides consulting services to social sector organizations. We serve over 500 organizations each year, both here in New York State and across the country.

Last year alone, CRE worked with, strengthened, and advised hundreds of groups leading the charge on the important issues of today – from immigrant rights, racial equity, health, and education, to housing, hunger, and policy and advocacy. These groups provide pivotal community-based services each day that are lifelines to New Yorkers.

These organizations are trusted – particularly by individuals living in communities that are hardest to count: high immigrant populations, non-English-speaking, vulnerable populations, people dealing with homelessness, people living in illegally divided apartments.

New York State must invest in these nonprofits – because they have the community connections that you need to establish to ensure a more accurate count. They need the resources – an investment from our City and State – that ensures they can amplify their education and outreach efforts to ensure a complete count in 2020.

Many of the people who we want to reach will not speak with government workers, and will remain hidden from them. The controversy over the citizenship question – whether it ultimately ends up in the census or not – has created sufficient and lingering concern among people already reticent to participate (such as undocumented immigrants and legal residents who are not citizens), which will continue to pose obstacles.

That is where New York City's robust nonprofit sector can – and should – play a role, because the community-based organizations have already forged relationships and built trust among the communities that need to be reached.

A recent Quinnipiac poll found that 46 percent of New Yorkers say that hearing from a local nonprofit organization that works in their community would make a difference in whether or not they choose to participate in the Census. These local nonprofits scored higher than newspapers, social media or even religious leaders as drivers of Census participation. And perhaps most critically, younger residents (18-34) – a group that tends to be the least likely to complete the Census survey – indicated the greatest trust in nonprofits as Census messengers.

Additionally, where CBOs can play a role is through getting people to sit down and fill out forms. This is the first year when residents will be asked to fill out the forms online: now we must factor in internet access and a comfort level with computers. Many nonprofits provide not only safe spaces but access to computers.

Nonprofits operate on razor thin margins with rigorous compliance requirements to do very specific programmatic work; anything above and beyond that work is not resourced. Yet these groups have the trust and ongoing connections with the communities they serve that are needed for an accurate count. Funding these groups for census outreach would allow them the staff time to help with the count by bolstering or implementing new community outreach programs focused on the Census.

This Census will impact us for the next decade - it affects our representation, our funding, resources, and economy. It touches on every aspect of all New Yorkers' lives.

Where an undercount hurts the sector I serve is significant: an undercount in New York State means less representation at the federal level. It affects funding for nonprofits working in high-need communities, and thus, less programs, and less services. It could lead to layoffs, and frankly, even some nonprofits closing their doors and many people losing service.

These are all concerns my organization is hearing from the nonprofits we serve. It's why we are bringing them together at a May 1 forum to discuss these challenges, and consider solutions – and I invite committee members to please contact me for more information.

Among your goals is to reach hard-to-count populations. By engaging with the nonprofit sector, and investing not just time but money to support their Census initiatives, you can achieve a much more accurate record of who is living in New York, what their needs are, and how all of us can ultimately strengthen our City and State.

I thank you for your time.

Footnote – Quinnipiac poll - <https://poll.qu.edu/new-york-city/release-detail?ReleaseID=2597>