



Testimony to the New York State Complete Count Commission

Presented by Jennifer Marino Rojas

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Good afternoon. My name is Jennifer Rojas and I am the Executive Director of the Child Care Council of Suffolk (“the Council”) and the co-chair of the early childhood subcommittee of Long Island’s Complete Count Committee.

The Child Care Council of Suffolk, Inc. is dedicated to ensuring that all children have equitable access to quality early care & learning opportunities. We connect thousands of families with child care, provide technical assistance and professional development to thousands of early childhood educators and we advocate on the local, state and federal level for a more effective and equitable child care system.

I want to thank the Governor, the NYS Complete Count Commission and our County Executives for taking leadership to ensure a complete count in New York State. My testimony will focus on (1) the undercounting of young children (2) the impact of any undercount on services that support young children and (3) the challenges and opportunities for ensuring a complete count of all children on Long Island.

Young Children Most Undercounted Age Group

Children under age 5 are a historically undercounted population. Data shows that young children have a higher undercount rate than any other age group – with an estimated 4.6 percent of young children going uncounted in the 2010 census.¹ The net undercount of young children has gotten worse over the past 20 years. According to Bill O’Hare, who has done extensive research on the US Decennial Census, “...In the 1980 US Census, the net undercount rate for young children was 1.4 percent but it has more than tripled since then. At the same time, the census coverage rate for adults has continued to improve”.²

The undercount is even higher for young children who also fall into other “hard to count” populations – especially children of color, children in immigrant families and children who live in communities with high poverty rates.³ Young Black and Hispanic children have the highest undercount rates – almost double the rate for non-Hispanic White young children.

¹U.S. Census Bureau (2016). U.S. Census Bureau (2016b) Investigating the 2010 Undercount of Young Children—A New Look at 2010 Census Omissions by Age, July 26, 2016.

² O’Hare, W.P. (2015) The Undercount of Young Children in the U.S. Census, Springer Publishers, figure 4.1, page 42

³ <http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/census/Fact-Sheet-Undercount-of-Young-Children.pdf>

This is especially concerning given that the changing demographics of Suffolk County indicate that more young children are in hard to count categories. According to the American Community Survey, since 2010:

- The percent of young children living in low-income households has increased (18% in 2010 compared with 24% in 2017)
- The number of young children in immigrant families has increased
- The number of children under age 5 who are foreign-born has increased
- The percent of young children living in “hard-to-count” communities overall has increased.

Programs for Young Children Impact by Census Data

An accurate and complete count is necessary to ensure that New York State and all of our counties receive the appropriate and fair share of funding and adequate representation in Congress. Funding for several key programs that impact young children is determined by the decennial census data including:

- **Child Care and Development Block Grant.** This federal funding supports low-income working families who need child care assistance so they can work or receive training. NYS receives \$806 million in CCDBG funding based on an allocation formula that uses the decennial census data. Allocations to each County are also in part based on the census. Suffolk County’s allocation is already insufficient and does not address the increasing need and changing demographics of our county. An undercount of young children will seriously exacerbate the child care crisis facing our county and state.
- **State Children’s Health Insurance Program & Medicaid.** More than 2 million children in New York rely on Medicaid or CHIP for their health coverage.⁴ Children with health coverage have better health, academic and life outcomes. Funding for these programs is determined by the decennial census data.
- **Head Start.** \$8.2 billion is allocated to local governments and non-profits to provide high-quality child development and family support programs. Proposals and allocations are determined based on census data.
- **SNAP.** Approximately 320,000 children are kept out of poverty each year through the SNAP program in New York.⁵ These children receive nutrition and food benefits that support their entire family, and stimulate the economy. Without accurate census data, this program will not be appropriately funded for New York.

These are just a few of the programs that most affect young children. But children also need adequately funded schools, libraries, after-school programs as well as adequate roadways, law

⁴ <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/New-York-Medicaid-CHIP-new-v1.pdf>

⁵ https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#New_York

enforcement and emergency services – all of which are impacted by census data. The count of the 2020 census will be used for until 2030 to make decisions about this critical services – which is why it is so important to get this right.

Opportunities & Challenges for a Complete Count

Thanks to the leadership of the Health & Welfare Council of LI and the Suffolk & Nassau County Executives, we have already begun working with our partners to raise awareness about the importance of the 2020 census throughout our communities and networks. We will work to reach families through child care, Head Start and Pre-K programs, home visiting programs, children’s libraries and museums, after-school and other programs for young children. We will also conduct outreach into communities including laundromats, parks & playgrounds, children’s events, grocery stores and other community sites frequented by families.

By starting now and educating our networks, we will have the chance to reach deep into the hard to count communities and increase participation.

We do have a very daunting challenge ahead of us, however. Many of our residents and community members have a legitimate and real fear of providing any information to our federal government. Immigrants and communities of color have been demonized by the President of the United States. He has referred to migrants seeking asylum as “UFC fighters” with “tattoos all over their faces” and in his two official trips to Long Island he has likened all immigrants to MS-13 gang members. Whether it is the ban on people from specific countries or encouraging military and law enforcement to be “rough” and violate human rights at the southern border – the President has created a deeply anti-immigrant culture.

His anti-immigrant rhetoric is now becoming reality through his policies – such as attempting to add a citizenship question on the 2020 census. Just the possibility of this has already made it almost impossible to count every person on Long Island. Even if the question is not included, we need to do extensive work to calm the fears of our residents and encourage them to complete the census.

We have been assured that census workers are prohibited from sharing any information with any entity outside of the Census Bureau. But, if I am being honest, many of us are asking if we can truly trust that this law will be enforced. Why else would the Administration be fighting so hard to add a citizenship question to the census? We need New York State to be clear and strong in the messaging around this issue starting now to attempt to alleviate some of the fear.

Resources are needed to overcome this huge barrier to a complete count. We need marketing and communication support that reaches deep into all communities. We need funding to hire people from within communities who can be trained to speak with and encourage all community members to complete the census. We need funding for libraries and other places with internet service to help more individuals access the online census.

Much of the outreach to the hard-to-count communities will be done by the community-based organizations and non-profit human service agencies that have long-standing relationships and trust with the residents. We will do this work because it is the right thing to do and because it is important to our residents – and quite frankly to our long-term funding. But these are the same agencies who are already stretched beyond capacity and that have not had a cost-of-living increase in many years. Resources and support must flow to the organizations who are trusted and who can effectively increase participation in the census.

Our children will inherit what we build – or destroy – over the next decade. Whether we lose representation in Congress, or build our infrastructure – it is our children that will have to deal with the consequences. It is their future that depends on what we do now to ensure a complete count in the 2020 census. The Child Care Council of Suffolk and the early learning community stand ready to support this important work.

Thank you.