

Testimony by Ashook Ramsaran on May 1, 2019 at QCCC

Good evening, everyone.

Thanks to Hon. Borough President and staff (in particular, Susie and Tim) for this opportunity to express my interest and my focus on Census 2020.

I hope I can get this message across in 3 minutes or less) as there are so many other speakers.

A little background:

I was born in Guyana of Indian parents (who migrated to Guyana in 1853). I immigrated to USA (New York) 51 years ago, graduated in engineering, worked in industry and then established my own manufacturing company in Queens – raised my family here and made Queens my home.

I am involved in volunteer capacities in civic, academic, religious and health organizations:

Queens Civic Congress (QCC)

Fresh Meadows Civic Association (FMHCA)

St John's University Center for Caribbean and Latin American Studies

New York Presbyterian Queens Hospital (Community Advisory Council)

First Presbyterian Church of Flushing

Hon. David Weprin Assembly District 24's South Asian Advisory Board

and

The Indian Diaspora Council International (IDC)

It is indeed a privilege for me and an honor to be a New Yorker - a **Queens** New Yorker.

I was also involved with Census 2000 and Census 2010.

Now involved with Census 2020 through QCCC (Table #5, CB#*) and South Asian & Indo-Caribbean Complete Count Committee.

Given my origin, background and interests, I want to emphasize my interest and motivation for optimum count in Census 2020 – in particular among the Guyanese community of Queens.

I commend Queens Borough President Melinda Katz for taking this initiative in establishing QCCC and all committee members and partners of QCCC in this effort for optimum count in Queens.

In particular, I commend Dr. Joseph Salvo of NYC Planning Dept for bringing us face to face with the realities of population, demographics and census statistics, especially the undercounted regions and neighborhoods, and his passion about the importance of the Census count. This further motivates me (and, I am sure, all of you in QCCC) to put our efforts in Census 2020. Thank you very much, Dr. Salvo.

While 40% of Queens' population is foreign born, the 2016 Statistics show that immigrants from Guyana are the **2nd highest source of immigrants to Queens at 7.1% - and 5th overall in NYC at 4.1%.**

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Mostly of Indian origin with migration starting in late 1960's and now approximately 150,000 strong at various generational levels (a fair percentage undocumented), the Guyanese population in Queens are concentrated in Richmond Hill, South Ozone Park, parts of Woodhaven and in Jamaica and Queens Village areas.

As with other new immigrant groups, the problem is the low count in Census 2010 among Guyanese population in Queens.

While the Census 2010 NYC return average is **61.9%** - and some areas of Queens far exceed that, the census return among Guyanese population in Queens in those zip codes falls way short, averaging **44% to 51%**. That is a serious under-count with consequences.

With so much at stake, that number has to increase and our efforts are to make that happen.

We should acknowledge and understand that recent immigrants came from countries where they experienced all sorts of government controls, sometimes intimidation, harassment and targeted punishment - and that fear and hesitation are still with most of them living here.

The on-going court case about US Citizenship question on the Census 2020 questionnaire further exacerbates this dilemma and makes our effort more difficult.

QCCC and Census 2020 are motivating people with awareness and protection of privacy of their personal information.

But we need to make an all-out effort to reassure recent immigrants - and other folks as well - of data security and privacy as Census 202 officials have been doing.

The important steps we are taking - scope, plan, act (to borrow a motivating action plan)

Scope:

The Guyanese population in targeted zip codes in Richmond Hill, South Ozone Park, parts of Woodhaven and in Jamaica and Queens Village areas

Plan:

Appealing and motivating messaging - the benefits of being counted: congressional seats and representation, funding apportionment, senior benefits, education, roads, etc.

Use of **trusted messengers** to make the appeal and motivate.

Use all the faith-based, civic, business, professional (medical, legal), media (print, radio/TV, social media) and social, neighborhood organizations - in particular school age children (middle/high school/college) and youth to convince parents of the benefits of being counted.

Use of elected officials and Census representatives to visit and participate at every level.

Recruit more census employees among the Guyanese population.

Act:

In process with meetings, planning and promotion.

We can learn from other recent immigrant groups in Queens and also share with you our areas of success, as well as hurdles and how we can overcome those.

Thank you.