

**NY STATE COMPLETE COUNT COMMISSION'S QUEENS COUNTY PUBLIC HEARING**

**Testimony – May 1, 2019**

**Presented by Mark Laster, Member of Borough President's Katz's  
Complete Count Committee**

Good evening, Commissioners – My name is Mark Laster and I am involved in numerous civic Organizations in the Forest Hills/Rego Park area as well as being a social worker for 38 years. As a resident of this community for 30 years, I would like to welcome you to Queens, the most diverse area on the planet!

I am here today to discuss the importance of assuring everyone is counted for the upcoming Census. As a social worker who has predominantly worked with the elderly and consumers of mental health service's, I can tell you the importance of assuring funding continues for these groups. Without everyone completing the census, we will see serious cuts to these vital services, which will lead to increased illness and hospitalizations of clients in these communities and end up costing more and impacting the quality of life for the clients I serve.

As a civic leader and member of Borough President Katz's Complete Count committee, I am part of the committee's recently started subcommittee covering community boards 5 and 6. Just last week, we had a conference call where we began to map out our plans for encouraging members of our community to complete the census. We prepared a list of about 25 organizations we would like to reach out to. We plan on meeting here in borough hall within the next few weeks to begin to strategize the most effective ways to reach out to our identified groups.

During our conference call, we discussed some of the challenges of doing this work. A number of people on our subcommittee have been involved in the census in the past and pointed out how historically it has been extremely difficult to reach members of our community. We discussed our concerns that for the first time, the census will be online and how many of our community members do not have easy access to computers and, even with this access, some

people are not computer literate. We also begun to discuss what we think would be effective messages to communicate to our varying communities. Personally, when I have discussed my concerns at CB6, I focused on how without a complete count, we would lose funding for important essential services in our community such as Police and Fire. I believe this would resonate in my community, since there is a great deal of respect for these services as well as other essential services.

As we continued our discussion, we agreed that though we are ambitious and committed with what we would like to do, we all have full time jobs as well as other civic commitments and we agreed that without additional funding to provide staff to do this outreach, we will not be able to accomplish as much as we would both like and desperately need to. We therefore thank the Governor and Legislators for providing Twenty Million Dollars in the most recently passed State budget but agreed with other advocates that to do the job that needs to be done, we need double that figure. We also discussed how this funding would be made available and given the urgency of getting the word out, we hope these funding mechanisms could be efficient and effective. Though the census is now 11 months away, the ground work that needs to be laid needs to start as soon as possible.

I would like to conclude by highlighting one of the major challenges I see with this census. I work at an agency that provides services to the immigrant community and we know that if the citizenship question appears on the census, it would make our job extremely difficult to assure our clients will complete it. Unfortunately, given the current administration stance against the immigrant community, there is a great deal of mistrust even with all the assurances provided by the Census Bureau. This underlines the need to assure that trusted voices within our communities are provided the support needed to assure we not only maintain funding for our vital services, but we are also able to maintain our current political representation in Washington. We do not want to again lose seats in Congress as we did in the 2010 census.

Thank you for coming to Queens to listen to our concerns and we all look forward in working with you in assuring everyone is counted.