



PARTNERSHIP FOR AMERICA'S CHILDREN

State and local child advocates working
together for a better future

Public Comment of Deborah Stein, J.D., Network Director of the Partnership for America's Children to the Census National Advisory Committee Meeting, November, 2018

My name is Deborah Stein, and I am the Network Director of the Partnership for America's Children. The Partnership's mission is to support its network of state and community multi-issue child advocacy organizations in effective advocacy. The Partnership has 52 member organizations in 41 states that advocate to improve policies for children at the state, local and federal level. Collectively they represent over 90% of the nation's children. The Partnership connects its members to peer expertise and national resources and facilitates interstate collaborations to deepen the level of impact of child advocacy within and across states. It fosters policy expertise, advocacy skills, and strong organizations.

Partnership members use Census data in their advocacy, and thirty Partnership members are also KIDS COUNT grantees in their state, serving as that state's data hub on children for policy makers, administrators, and nonprofits.

The Partnership for America's Children is serving as the national hub on the undercount of young children in the 2020 Decennial Census. In this role the Partnership is co-leading a national working group of child-serving organizations that is developing strategies to help ensure that all young children are counted, and providing tools and resources to its members to help them ensure that all young children in their states or localities are counted.

The Partnership and its members are deeply concerned about the undercount of young children. We believe that counting young children should be a top priority in the 2020 Census and should be considered at every stage of preparations. The 2010 Census missed nearly one in ten children aged 0-4, or about 2 million children; the net young child undercount (after eliminating duplications) was nearly 5% or almost one million children. This age group had by far the worst undercount of any age group. This trend has been growing over the last several Decennial Censuses even as our ability to count other age groups has improved.

Even worse, the children that are missed most often are children of color. Thus, children who are already disproportionately poor, vulnerable and most in need of strong communities and services are likely to get less than their fair share of federal and state dollars and adequate services in their communities.

The risk of a significant young child undercount in the 2020 Decennial Census is even greater now that millions of immigrant families are likely to be afraid to respond to the Census because it will include a question on citizenship. Some six million children live in mixed status families with at least one undocumented member. However, nearly all young children are citizens.

As my June comments indicated, we are deeply concerned that the Census messaging research, which included over forty focus groups with a variety of different groups, included not one focus group with parents and other caregivers of young children even though they are the group at highest risk of being undercounted. Moreover, the CBAM survey, while it did identify whether participants had young children in their household, apparently asked not one question targeted to parents about what would persuade them to include children in their census form, what parenting media they access readily, or what messengers they trust the most when considering issues around their children.

We had been told that while these questions were not asked in the CBAMs survey, it would be analyzed to determine what information it could provide about the undercount of young children.

It is therefore extremely disturbing to note that the presentation on CBAMs findings to the National Advisory Committee for this meeting includes not one mention of families with young children. Given that the survey was completed by 17,000 people, it should be able to produce robust results for analyzing the subgroup of families with young children and even the subgroup of low-income families with young children that filled it out.

Accordingly, we ask the National Advisory Committee to recommend that the Census Bureau conduct and make publicly available a thorough analysis of the CBAMs cross tabs to identify what concerns they have about completing the Census (questions 38-43), what messages are more effective with households with young children (questions 20-34), and what media they use (questions 6, 7 and 8).

Specifically we ask that the Census Bureau be requested to analyze the answers to the questions mentioned above for the following groups, to better understand what challenges exist for counting young children in groups we think might be at risk of being missed:

- low- and moderate- income households (breaking out incomes by the four categories under \$75,000) with young children compared to answers for all households, to see if there are differences;
- low-income households with young children compared them to high and middle income households with young children, to see if there are differences by income;
- households with young children broken out education level;
- households with young children by the gender of the respondent;
- households with young children broken out by size of household;
- households with young children broken out by race;
- households with young children that speak English as a primary language compared to households with young children that do not speak English, to see if there are differences by language.

We note in particular that it is just as useful to know that the answers are the same for these families as that they are different. Either way, it will help the Bureau and census advocates know how to reach out families with young children, and what messages to use.

We also ask that any future reports on communications include specific details about families with young children. Given that the 2010 census missed over 2 million young children, and there was a net undercount of 1 million young children, we think that it can only help the Bureau do a better job if it automatically examines the impact on counting young children at every stage.

At the same time, we commend the update from the Undercount of Young Children subteam. We note that their discussion of young children in complex families sheds light on which children are missed and can help reduce the number of children missed in the census.

In our role running the national hub on the undercount of young children, we would be delighted to work with you on these efforts, and to work with national and state child advocates to identify and share other strategies for improving the count of young children. We look forward to partnering with you to help reverse the steady decline in the count of young children and ensure that all our kids are counted, and get the representation, funding, and services they need to thrive.

Thank you for considering our recommendations, and for giving us this opportunity to comment.

Deborah Stein

Network Director.