

Public Comments of Dr. Terry Brooks, Executive Director of Kentucky Youth Advocates
to the Census' National Advisory Committee Meeting, May 2019

My name is Terry Brooks, and I am Executive Director of Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA). KYA has over 40 years of experience as a trusted, independent voice for Kentucky's children. KYA's work includes research and data analysis, strategic communications, coalition building, advocacy, and technical assistance in the areas of economic security, education, health, safety, and juvenile and criminal justice. All efforts, decisions, and activities are driven by a commitment to the organization's vision: to make Kentucky the best place in America to be young.

Kentucky Youth Advocates uses a wide variety of Census data in our efforts to improve the well-being of children across our state. We are very concerned that the implementation of the Census Bureau's new differential privacy policy will limit the data that will be produced from the Decennial Census and result in some of the data we have been using no longer being made available. While we understand that no decisions have been made yet about implementing differential privacy in the American Community Survey (ACS) and other Census surveys, we are also concerned that decisions made about data from the Decennial Census may be carried over to these surveys later; that is, if some kinds of data are unavailable from the Decennial Census, the same data may also be unavailable from the ACS.

Granular data from the Decennial Census has been invaluable to our child advocacy work. For example, in 2013 we aggregated Decennial Census data at the census block and census tract levels to form data for each of Metro Louisville's city council districts to show local elected officials, stakeholders and community groups how well-being differs across Kentucky's most populous county based on place, race, and income. Decennial Census data were used for adult and child population numbers, the child population disaggregated by race/ethnicity, proportion in owned homes versus rented homes, vacant housing units, and family types. Population data from the Decennial Census were also used in calculating rates of child deaths, teen deaths, and teen births. The report can be viewed at http://kyyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/KYA_JeffCoBook_WebFinal.pdf.

In addition, we understand that one open question is whether the Bureau will be able to produce data on the child's relationship to the householder. A recent Census Bureau presentation on 2020 Census data products indicated "unresolved challenges with using formally private disclosure avoidance methods for 2020: including tabulating tables that require the linkage of data from the person and housing records (e.g., characteristics about children in households or about the householder)." If this guiding principle were carried over to the ACS and other surveys it would mean no data on child poverty would be produced.

Child poverty is a key measure of child well-being and impacts not only economic security, but also health, education, and safety. It is absolutely essential that as the Bureau moves forward in deciding what data to make available, it protects its ability to report child poverty data, including at very small geographies, when it implements this new privacy policy for the ACS and other surveys.

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10200 Linn Station Rd
Suite 310
Louisville, KY 40223

502.895.8167
888.825.5592

kyyouth.org

We understand that the Bureau is interested in receiving input on what data it should produce. We accordingly recommend that the Bureau:

- 1) host a series of webinars that explain exactly which Decennial Census data might be eliminated, and which data might only be available for larger geographies, using terminology that is commonly understood, and including a period for questions and answers; and
- 2) provide new opportunities for child advocates and others to provide comments on what data they use and why it matters, after the scope of these changes has been explained.

We also ask that the NAC recommend that the Bureau makes sure that any decisions about data available from the Decennial Census protect its ability to produce data on child poverty from other surveys.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terry I. Brooks". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Terry I. Brooks, Ed.D.
Executive Director

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