



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, May, 2019

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. Our members advocate to improve policies for children at the state, local, and federal levels. Collectively they represent over 90% of the nation's children. Partnership members use Census data in their advocacy, and 30 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 our members to help them ensure that all young children in their states or localities are counted.

As part of our work, we are conducting message research with families of young children around the 2020 Decennial Census. So far, we have conducted seven focus groups, with four more planned, to be followed by an online survey. In every focus group so far, nearly all participants have said that they would not include on their Census form a family that was living in the household temporarily, even if the family had no other permanent residence and would not be counted elsewhere. We suspect that these temporary residents are often parents and children who are "couch surfing"—living temporarily with relatives, and often moving from household to household, because they are homeless and have not yet secured the resources necessary to rent their own home.

The Census Bureau residence rules indicate respondents should include these families who are staying at a location temporarily if they have no other usual residence. But people in our focus groups are so sure they should not be included that they do not even consider questioning this choice. It seems unlikely that they would seek information from .Census Bureau resources about whether to include these families.

We are deeply concerned because a lot of research shows household complexity is related to young children being missed in the Census and a recent study found measures of family structure/complexity were among the most powerful predictors of differences in net under counts for young children across large counties. These factors could be connected to temporary residence in the household.

<https://www.prb.org/what-factors-are-most-closely-associated-with-the-net-undercount-of-young-children-in-the-u-s-census/>

There is evidence that the number of families with children that live temporarily with others is quite high. The National Center for Homeless Education has collected data on the overall number of doubled-up homeless students in school years from 2014-2015 to 2016-2017 school year: their data shows that over a million school-aged children were “doubled up” in 2016-17. <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Federal-Data-Summary-SY-14.15-to-16.17-Final-Published-2.12.19.pdf> (p. 15) Three-fourths of homeless students are “doubled up”. You can find the data by state or school district here: <https://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-element-explorer.cfm>.

Very young children also have face levels of housing instability that suggest that Census respondents would consider them temporary and not include them. We know that 16 percent of infants live in crowded housing and 2.5 percent have moved three or more time before they turn three. https://stateofbabies.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/State_of_Babies_Yearbook_full_digital_download_2.28.19.pdf.

We urge the Census Bureau to include in its messaging campaigns explicit examples indicated that these temporary residents should be counted if they have no permanent residence, to highlight it in any FAQs and other resources for families seeking guidance on who to include, and to make sure that enumerators and those staffing the phone centers probe for such temporary residents.

Also, we are very concerned about what consequences the Census Bureau’s new policy on confidentiality (often referred to as differential privacy or formally private disclosure avoidance methods) might have on the availability of data on the well-being of young children. A presentation at the recent Population Association of America annual meeting noted that “[u]nresolved challenges with using formally private disclosure avoidance methods for 2020 include 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).” While we understand that no decisions have been made about implementing this policy in the American Community Survey or other surveys, we note that if the Census Bureau does not report this data from the Decennial Census and if it is determined that the ACS must follow the same policy in order to protect confidentiality, this will mean that the Bureau will be unable to report child poverty data and other key child well-being data.

We understand that the Bureau is interested in receiving input on what data it should produce. Accordingly, we ask that the Bureau:

- 1) host a series of webinars that explain exactly which data might be eliminated in the 2020 Census data products and which data might be available only for larger geographies, using terminology that is commonly understood and including a period for questions and answers,
- 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

Thank you for considering our recommendations, and for giving us this opportunity to comment. We are happy to provide further information; you can contact me at dstein@foramericaschildren.org or 202-290-1816.

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