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Vanessa Caracoza, coalition manager for Philly Counts 2020, explains initiatives to support an accurate census count. (Pavlina Cerna/PN)



2020 marks the 24th time the United States will undertake the largest nationally conducted operation — the census.

The census is a nationwide count of all people living in 50 states, District of Columbia and five United States territories. It is conducted every 10 years by the U.S. Census Bureau, a nonpartisan government agency.

The final count has an economic and political impact on each state. It helps determine how \$675 billion in federal funds will be distributed and affects the number of seats Pennsylvania has in the House of Representatives and the Electoral College.

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Also, the census data helps form district boundaries and serves as a base for statistical purposes.

In case of an undercount, Philadelphia could lose millions of dollars in federal funding and the state of Pennsylvania could lose representation in Congress.

To ensure a complete and accurate count, Mayor Jim Kenney signed an executive order in January 2019 establishing Philly Counts 2020, an organization supporting the efforts of the U.S. Census Bureau.

There are various minority groups in danger of being undercounted. Amid current political climate and due to President Donald Trump administration's efforts to include the citizenship question on census (which will not be included), misconceptions have widely spread within the immigrant community and damage has been already done, **The New York Times reported last year.**

In 2017, **the Pew Charitable Trusts reported** that 13.8% of Philadelphians were born outside the U.S. It is also estimated that there are approximately 50,000 undocumented immigrants living in the Philadelphia area, **The Philadelphia Inquirer reported.**

Representatives of the U.S. Census Bureau, Philly Counts 2020 and Philadelphia community leaders

spoke with Philadelphia Neighborhoods about the importance of the census, facts about the count and their efforts to reach the immigrant community.

IS FILLING OUT THE CENSUS REQUIRED?

The census is mandatory, as mentioned in **Article I, Section 2** of the U.S. Constitution. Not participating in the census can result in a fine, **according to the federal law**. Jennifer Braxton, a media partnership specialist at the U.S. Census Bureau, said that while required, filling out the census is not enforced.

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IS CENSUS ONLY FOR AMERICAN CITIZENS?

“The census counts people,” said Vanessa Caracoza, coalition manager for Philly Counts 2020. “It doesn’t care about what’s your immigration status.”

While President Donald Trump’s administration tried to push for a citizenship question to be

included on the 2020 Census, **The U.S. Supreme Court blocked the efforts in July 2019**, citing “sufficient reason for concern” regarding the intent behind the inclusion of the question.

Despite the citizenship question being struck down, there is still the misconception it will appear on the census.

Carmen Febo-San Miguel, executive director and CEO of **Taller Puertorriqueño**, acknowledged the arts and culture center’s promotion of the census. As an organization serving the Puerto Rican and Latino population in the Fairhill section of Philadelphia, she stressed the importance of being counted but understood there is fear.

“They are traditionally undercounted due to fears of deportation,” Febo-San Miguel said. “That they’re going to lose benefits because they are undocumented. That they are going to be accused of something criminal.”

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IS THE CENSUS SAFE REGARDING DATA?

“We want our immigrant communities to know that the census is safe, protected by Title 13 and that no citizenship questions will be asked,” Caracoza said.

Title 13 of the U.S. Code guarantees that private information will never be published, and no

identifiable information will be disclosed, among other protective measures.

“The information that you provide will be held under the strictest confidentiality for 72 years,” Braxton said.

Charito Morales, community organizer for the Providence Center and **Census Champion**, warned residents of the dangers of census fraud, as scammers may pose as census workers in order to steal your information.

“If you see someone that comes to your property and knocks on your door and says, ‘Hey, I’m from the census, I need your ID,’ or asks you to step outside of your house, close the door,” Morales said. “Call 911, 311, or Census 2020.”

The Census Bureau will never ask for ID, Social Security number, bank account information, money or donations, or anything that has to do with political affiliation, **according to the census website.**

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IS ENGLISH THE ONLY LANGUAGE PROVIDED IN THE CENSUS?

The 2020 census will be available in 12 additional languages besides English, Braxton said. Participants will be prompted to choose one of the 13 languages both online and over the phone.

Besides English, the census will be available in

Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese. Korean, Russian, Arabic, Tagalog, Polish, French, Haitian Creole, Portuguese and Japanese, according to Braxton.

Additionally, there will be 58 language guides, Braxton added, allowing census participants to identify the language they speak on a document enumerators will carry with them.

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WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU ARE NOT COUNTED?

An undercount in a population can negatively impact the allocation of federal funding for community services and programs. Services such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Head Start, and the Federal Pell Grant are determined on census-based population numbers, deciding how funding will be distributed.

Aside from allocation, census data is also used to determine the characteristics of a population eligible to receive funds and monitor the performance of the programs receiving such funding.

Without an accurate count, certain areas will be underfunded in the upcoming decade, and groups and neighborhoods will not receive resources.

It is estimated that Pennsylvania will lose \$2,100 a year in federal funding for each person who is not counted during the 2020 census, **the Inquirer reported.**

The state lost \$44 million in federal funding due to undercounting 25,197 children in the previous census, **according to the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children.**

“Right now we are in a situation where because

[children under 5] were undercounted in 2010, we have things like little school houses in school yards,” Braxton said. “We have teachers setting up GoFundMe pages because they don’t have enough supplies.”

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HOW CAN I FILL OUT THE CENSUS?

There are four ways to participate in 2020 census

- Online
- By mail
- Over the phone
- In person once census numerators start going door to door

For the first time in history, the census will be available online. Starting March 12, participants can fill the census online at **2020census.gov**.

In mid-March, invitations to fill out census will start arriving via mail, prompting households to participate online, via phone or by mail.

Following Census Day on April 1, census takers, or numerators, will start visiting households that have not answered the census yet.

By law, the census must be delivered to the president of the United States by Dec. 31. The count will then go into effect in 2021.

*Please email any questions or concerns about this story to: **editor@philadelphianeighbors.com***



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