October 9, 2020

The Honorable Wilbur Ross   Dr. Steven Dillingham
Secretary   Director
U.S. Department of Commerce   U.S. Census Bureau
1401 Constitution Avenue NW   4600 Silver Hill Road
Washington, D.C. 20230   Washington, D.C. 20233

Dear Secretary Ross and Dr. Dillingham,

We write today to express our serious concerns regarding the U.S. Census Bureau's blatant disregard for transparency and lack of cooperation in providing localized data to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts on the ongoing decennial census count. Despite your agency's reports that 99.8% of Massachusetts residents have already been enumerated, state and local officials have publicly expressed concerns with the unsubstantiated nature of these claims.[1] In light of these emerging concerns, we request that you immediately provide Secretary of the Commonwealth William Galvin access to localized data from the Nonresponse Followup Operation, which is critical to detecting undercounted areas before the 2020 Census count ends on October 31.

In late September, the Census Bureau asserted that 29.8% of Massachusetts residents have been counted through door-knocking efforts and that the remaining 68.8% of residents filled out forms on their own.[2] To confirm these enumeration rates for the Nonresponse Followup Operation, Secretary William Galvin requested access to localized data, which would also help state officials and volunteers identify specific neighborhoods that need greater outreach. However, this request was denied by federal census officials who only provided general data on which towns are facing issues. As members of the Massachusetts Congressional delegation, we find this news particularly distressing when there are a number of cities across the Commonwealth – including but not limited to Springfield, Chicopee, Holyoke, Pittsfield, Brockton, Boston, Fall River, Lawrence, Lynn, New Bedford, and Worcester – with neighborhoods that still stand at risk of being undercounted.

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[1] Steph Solis, MassLive Media, "Massachusetts still doesn't have localized data to verify Census Bureau's claims of widespread participation, Secretary of the Commonwealth William Galvin says" (October 2020) https://www.masslive.com/politics/2020/10/massachusetts-still-doesnt-have-localized-data-to-verify-census-bureaus-claims-of-widespread-participation-secretary-of-the-commonwealth-william-galvin-says.html
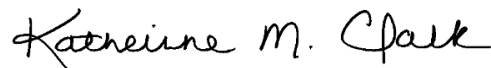
[2] United States Census 2020, "Total Response Rates by State" (September 2020) https://2020census.gov/en/response-rates/nrfu.html

Undercounts in the 2020 Census would have profound and long-lasting consequences across the Commonwealth as our nation recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to outlining congressional districts, the decennial census is widely utilized in analyzing trends in health care, poverty, housing, race, and ethnicity. Lawmakers can properly target resources and funnel relief to communities with the greatest need only when everyone is counted. This is particularly true for vulnerable communities that have been historically underrepresented in the decennial census – such as minorities, students, seniors, and immigrants – and hit hardest by the pandemic.
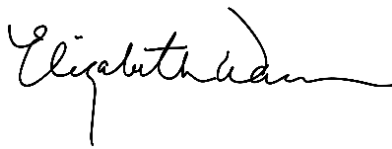
By refusing to provide access to localized data on enumeration, federal census officials are preventing the Commonwealth from ensuring a fair and accurate census count. As the nation's leading provider of quality data, we call upon the U.S. Census Bureau to immediately provide localized data to the Secretary of the Commonwealth in order for the state to ensure an inclusive and complete census count.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Katherine Clark
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Elizabeth Warren
UNITED STATES SENATOR

Edward J. Markey
UNITED STATES SENATOR

Richard E. Neal
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

James P. McGovern
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Joseph P. Kennedy III
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Stephen Lynch
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William R. Keating
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Seth Moulton
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Lori Trahan
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Ayanna Pressley
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