Policy Brief Calls for Congress to Ensure Accurate Census Count

April 15, 2019, Washington D.C. -- With less than a year before the 2020 Census begins, the Census Bureau faces significant challenges which threaten the fairness and accuracy of the population count, warns a new Policy Brief, The 2020 Census: The Importance of an Accurate and Robust Accounting of our Nation’s Population from the Committee for Economic Development (CED). Given the high stakes involved, CED is urging Congress to ensure that the agency has adequate leadership, funding and staffing to generate an accurate count.

A decennial census is required by the Constitution and the next official count begins in April 1, 2020. It is the primary source of data on the nation’s population and economy. Not only is census data used to determine our system of political representation, it informs business development and investment, and guides the allocation of federal funds to states and local communities.

“The stakes for getting an accurate count in the census couldn’t be higher,” said Robert Kueppers, Senior Partner, Global Regulatory & Public Policy (retired) at Deloitte LLP, and a Co-Chair of CED’s Money in Politics Subcommittee. “Time is running out. It is critical that we get this right.”

Unfortunately, the Census Bureau experiences significant setbacks in the planning and implementation process, including:

1. Delay in confirming leadership – The current Director was not confirmed until January 2019 – 18 months after the position became vacant, and just 15 months before the census commences.
2. Lack of funding – For the first time, American residents will be able to respond to the census questions online. However, unexpectedly high technology costs and underfunding from Congress have caused the agency to delay some outreach programs and cancel others.
3. Workforce shortage – A strong economy and low unemployment rate could make hiring of thousands of census workers difficult.
4. Legal challenges – The agency faces several lawsuits focused on the decision to include a citizenship question on the 2020 survey. Mindful of the importance of the census’ accuracy, the court needs to address this issue expeditiously to avoid further disruption of the process.

“The census is an invaluable tool for businesses, and the single best source of information about the demographics and growth potential of the American market,” said Jane Sherburne, Principal of Sherburne PLLC, and a Co-Chair of CED’s Money in Politics Subcommittee.
“Companies rely on this unique and critical resource to drive more informed and forward-looking business decisions.”

“The census is the foundation of fair political representation since it is the basis for apportioning seats in the U.S. House of Representatives,” said former Congressman Ron Klein, Partner at Holland & Knight LLP, and a Co-Chair of CED’s Money in Politics Subcommittee. “Without an accurate count, our nation’s promise of equal representation cannot be realized.”

What’s more, hundreds of billions of federal funds are distributed based on census data to states and localities for such critical programs as homeland security, natural disaster recovery, education, public health, Medicaid, and supplemental nutrition programs.

“The data compiled by the census is a public good and serves as vital information for both the public and private sectors,” said Nathan Rosenberg, Founding Partner of Insigniam, and a Co-Chair of CED’s Money in Politics Subcommittee. “We ask that Congress take appropriate actions to ensure that the census produces accurate, credible, robust and secure data.”

Read the Policy Brief

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