

CONGRESS: It's Up to You!

#Extend2020CensusDeadlines #EndTheCensusConfusion #SaveOurCensus
Why Congress should let the Census Bureau carry out the plan its experts created

Now that a federal court has ordered the Census Bureau to continue counting operations through October, the bureau can no longer produce accurate, high-quality census numbers by the current reporting deadlines for apportionment and redistricting data. The GAO and Commerce Inspector General agree: the Census Bureau cannot compress data processing and quality assurance work any further and still tabulate acceptably accurate results by December 31 for apportionment.

Congress must set a clear path forward by pushing back those deadlines by 120 days each, as the administration requested in April. Accurate 2020 Census data are critical for the prudent, fair allocation of federal resources to states and localities for the next decade, especially to support economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and with emergency preparedness and response in natural disaster zones.

- The HEROES Act provisions to push back reporting deadlines for apportionment and redistricting data by 120 days each, as the administration requested in April, should no longer be a “sticking point” for negotiators.
 - ➔ The Commerce Secretary has acknowledged in court that the Census Bureau cannot continue counting operations past October 5th and still produce accurate, high quality census numbers for apportionment by the current December 31 statutory deadline.
 - ➔ The government told the federal district court in Maryland last month: “[W]e wish to be crystal clear that if the Court were to extend the data collection period past September 30, 2020, the Census Bureau would be unable to meet its statutory deadlines to produce apportionment counts prior to December 31, 2020 and redistricting data prior to April 1, 2021. ... We simply cannot shorten post processing beyond the already shortened 3-month period.”
 - ➔ The shortened timeline requires the bureau to “streamline” many components of data processing. **According to the Commerce Department Inspector General, “The streamlined data processing under the accelerated census plan poses a myriad of risks to accuracy and completeness.”**
 - ➔ Commerce Secretary Ross decided to set a new October 5th end date for counting operations after Census Deputy Director Ron Jarmin said the bureau could not continue field work beyond that date and still produce apportionment tabulations before December 31. *By continuing the door-knocking operation until Oct. 31, Dr. Jarmin said, the Census Bureau could improve the count in rural areas, tribal lands, and hard-to-count communities.*
 - ➔ The census doesn’t end when counting operations stop. Once the Census Bureau finishes collecting data — from 140 million housing units, from group facilities, from people experiencing homelessness or living in transitory locations — it begins a painstaking, complex, and highly specialized series of activities to process and improve the raw data. The pre-pandemic census plan built-in 153 days for these activities; the bureau asked for about 180 days in its COVID-adjusted operational plan, with the administration’s support.

Even if Congress can’t vote on the extensions now, leaders from both parties should let the Commerce Secretary and Census Director know that they will push back the reporting deadlines, especially for apportionment, at the earliest legislative opportunity in a lame duck session.