



Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics

COPAFS Statement on the Executive Order Excluding Undocumented Immigrants from the 2020 Census Counts for Apportionment

July 27, 2020

The Executive Memorandum¹ seeking to exclude undocumented immigrants from the apportionment base following the 2020 census is unprecedented and threatens the accuracy of the count. A change in how Census data are used for apportionment will trigger significant congressional and legal debate. That discussion is separate from the active effort to conduct an accurate count.

The primary purpose of the decennial census is to count the whole number of persons in each state regardless of status. This Executive Order could depress the response rate, especially among harder to reach populations which are essential to a valid enumeration of those living in the US. Currently, the Census Bureau is starting in-person Non-Response Follow-Up (NRFU) efforts throughout the country to maximize the response rate. These in-person activities, difficult under normal circumstances, are further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing guidance throughout many states. Indeed, there have already been delays² in initiating NRFU activities due to the pandemic. This directive from the White House unnecessarily introduces another layer of complication to the census. As with the effort to add a citizenship question last year, the timing of this order brings up methodological issues at a moment when the implications cannot be well studied. It may prove destructive to a successful decennial census and the validity of future data products which rely on an accurate count of the US population by discouraging accurate responses.

COPAFS urges the White House to retract this memorandum and refrain from issuing any further guidance which may impact the 2020 decennial census data collection effort.

Further, given the delays with in-person NRFU activities and other census operations as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we ask that the deadline for delivering data from the Census be extended four months. In particular, we ask that the deadline for delivering the apportionment counts to the President be moved from December 31, 2020 to April 30, 2021, and the deadline for providing data to state redistricting officials be pushed from March 31, 2021 to July 31, 2021.

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/memorandum-excluding-illegal-aliens-apportionment-base-following-2020-census/>

² <https://2020census.gov/en/news-events/operational-adjustments-covid-19.html>