

Statement by Former U.S. Census Bureau Directors
August 4, 2020

**On the Importance of Extending the 2020 Census Statutory Deadlines to Achieve
A Fair and Accurate Enumeration of the United States**

The Census Bureau has addressed the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic by delaying the start of many 2020 Census field operations. Most significantly the start of the operation to enumerate those households that do not self-respond (nonresponse follow-up or NRFU) was scheduled to take place from May 15 through July 31, 2020. The Census Bureau was forced to reschedule most of this operation to take place from August 11 through October 30, 2020. In order to accommodate this delay, the professional staff at the Census Bureau determined that a four-month extension of the legally mandated deadlines for delivering Apportionment and redistricting data was necessary.

Having helped to plan, execute or lead five decennial censuses serving nine Presidents of both parties, our expert opinion is that failing to extend the deadlines to April 30, 2021 will result in seriously incomplete enumerations in many areas across our country. The Census Bureau will not be able to carry out the NRFU fully and will be forced to take steps such as fewer in-person visits and rely instead on the use of administrative records or statistical techniques on a much larger scale than in previous census.

The end result will be under-representation of those persons that NRFU was expected to reach and, at even greater rates for traditionally hard-to-count populations and over-representation of all other populations with potentially extreme differential undercounts.

The Census Bureau will be faced with the enormous burden of determining whether the 2020 Census results are sub-standard. We urge the Congress to share that burden. Task a suitable independent institution – any apolitical and trusted institution of its choosing -- to produce *predetermined quality metrics* that can assess if the final 2020 numbers match other historical and reasonable estimates of the population the Census Bureau produces. And if not, recommend what steps the country should take.

We also call upon the Census Bureau to make transparency and openness a priority for the 2020 Census at this challenging time. The timely release of measures of quality and progress is essential to assure stakeholders that a fair and accurate enumeration is underway.

These transparency measures should include daily reports of the completion percentage of NRFU at levels consistent with the current self-response rates, the rate of proxy enumeration, and other process metrics.

In conclusion, we strongly urge the Congress to extend the legal deadlines for the 2020 Census and to require that the Census Bureau to continue all data collection operations through October 30, 2020.

Vincent Barabba (1973-76 & 1979-81)

Kenneth Prewitt (1998-2001)

Robert Groves (2009–2012)

John Thompson (2013-2017)