



NEWS RELEASE

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NALEO Educational Fund Strongly Opposes Department of Justice Request to Add Citizenship Question to Census 2020

Adding untested question on citizenship to census questionnaire would result in millions of wasted taxpayer dollars and depressed participation nationwide

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund today released a statement from its executive director Arturo Vargas in response to the [December 12, 2017, letter](#) from the Department of Justice to Acting Census Director Ron Jarmin, requesting a new citizenship question on the 2020 Census:

“The U.S. Department of Justice’s request for the U.S. Census Bureau to add a question on citizenship to the 2020 Census, which comes less than three months before the Bureau must submit final questionnaire wording to Congress, would waste millions of taxpayer dollars and significantly depress response rates in our nation’s decennial count if implemented.

“Since the adoption of the 14th Amendment, the Constitution has mandated that all persons—regardless of race, citizenship or legal status—be included in the count that is conducted of the American people every 10 years. Used for the purposes of Congressional reapportionment, legislative redistricting, and the distribution of billions of dollars in federal funds, a fair and accurate census is a pivotal civil rights issue for the nation’s second largest population group and all Americans.

“The Department of Justice inexplicably invokes upholding the Voting Rights Act of 1965 as its justification for the request. Data on citizenship are already available and readily used in litigation in court. The data have been collected in the census “long form” for decades, up until 2000, when it was replaced by the current American Community Survey. Adding a citizenship question to the decennial questionnaire would increase the respondent burden in 2020, and duplicate the current efforts of the Census Bureau, leading to increased waste of public funds.

“It is also troubling that the Department of Justice would ask for a question to be added to the questionnaire just as the Census Bureau is making its final preparations for Census 2020. Each question on the decennial survey has been thoroughly tested to ensure it is well understood by the public, and does not depress response rates. Adding any question at this moment, whether on citizenship or any other topic, would sabotage the Census Bureau’s efforts as it prepares to implement a re-engineered, high-tech enumeration strategy. The U.S. Census Bureau is already facing an uphill climb, forced to conduct the federal government’s largest civilian mobilization in years with insufficient funding for the task ahead.”

"Census Bureau field representatives conducting other surveys and experiments have reported that they are encountering unprecedented fear among test respondents. Adding a question on citizenship at this time will further exacerbate such fear and distrust in the Census, further risking an inaccurate count. Americans are increasingly losing faith in the ability of the government to protect their private information, and the addition of an untested question on citizenship would sabotage any chance of having a successful Census 2020. With vigorous research and testing already completed and only three months to go before the agency must submit its final questions to Congress, now is not the time for our nation to devote precious resources towards this misguided and unnecessary pursuit.

"There are no second chances with the census. We urge U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross to dismiss the U.S. Department of Justice's request and to move forward with only those questions that have been thoroughly researched and tested in advance of 2020."

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About NALEO Educational Fund

NALEO Educational Fund is the nation's leading non-partisan, non-profit organization that facilitates the full participation of Latinos in the American political process, from citizenship to public service.