August 3, 2023

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| The Honorable Robert Santos  Director  U.S. Census Bureau  4600 Silver Hill Road  Suitland, MD 20746 |  |

Dear Director Santos:

Thank you for your ongoing service as our nation’s 26th director of the U.S. Census Bureau. I write today to express my concern regarding the Census Bureau’s recent announcement of further delays in the release of data from the 2020 Decennial Census.

As the government’s largest statistical agency, the Census Bureau plays an important role in providing all levels of government with consequential demographic information. Decennial Census statistical data is essential for understanding the current state of our country. Moreover, accurate and timely Decennial Census data helps improve government operations and programs, ensuring that funding reflect the needs of our communities. Specifically, the data secured from the Decennial Census informs many aspects of government operation, from the federal government’s ability to allocate appropriate funding for critical federal programs and services, to state and local government’s budgeting and fiscal planning.

With that said, on May 31, 2023, the Census Bureau announced that it will further delay the release of certain data from the 2020 Decennial Census to September 2024, including the Detailed Demographic and Housing Characteristics File B (Detailed DHC-B) and the Supplemental Demographic and Housing Characteristics File (S-DHC).[[1]](#footnote-1) The Detailed DHC-B provides information on household type, and whether a house is owned or rented for approximately 370 racial and ethnic groups and approximately 1,200 American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages. In addition, the S-DHC provides detailed numbers on household size, counts of people living in certain household and family types, “including the total population in households, average household size by age and tenure, average family size, household and family type for people under 18 years old, and total population in households by tenure.”

The Census Bureau previously reported that this data would be released in May 2023, after being first postponed two years ago, to allow for more processing time and implementation of the new privacy method.[[2]](#footnote-2) In addition to delaying the release of this information, the Census Bureau announced it will also limit the scope of publicly available data of the S-DHC as a result of a newly employed differential privacy method. According to the Census Bureau, the agency cannot ensure protection of anonymity and confidentiality of individuals who completed the Census due to this new privacy method and plans to only make national and state level data available.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The importance of receiving timely information from both of these data sets cannot be understated, and any further delay or narrowing of the scope of this information will present additional challenges for the planning and daily operations of government on all levels in communities across the nation. As such, I request your response to the below questions.

1. As previously outlined, timely and wholistic data from the 2020 Decennial Census is necessary for effective governing. Why has the release of remaining statistical data, including S-DHC data, been delayed from May 2023 to September 2024?
2. Prior to making the decision to again delay and limit the release of this data, did the U.S. Census Bureau engage with state and local officials to determine the impact this decision would have on their operations? Moreover, how have these changes been communicated to federal, state, and local governments that depend on this data?
3. Maintaining the privacy of individuals during the Decennial Census process is of utmost importance. How is the U.S. Census Bureau making adjustments for the 2030 Decennial Census to ensure that all relevant data files are able to be released while maintaining the necessary protections of individuals’ identities and other sensitive information? Will this delay impact the 2030 Decennial Census?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your response and working with you and the Bureau to ensure the public availability of critical data from the 2020 Decennial Census.

Sincerely,



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Thomas R. Carper

United States Senator

1. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2023/2020-census-data-products.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2022/2020-census-data-products-schedule-2023.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade/2020/planning-management/process/disclosure-avoidance/differential-privacy> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)