

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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February 6, 2026

The Honorable Howard W. Lutnick
Secretary
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Mr. George M. Cook
Acting Director
U.S. Census Bureau
4600 Silver Hill Road
Washington, DC 20233

Dear Secretary Lutnick and Mr. Cook:

We write to you to express our concern regarding the Census Bureau's recent changes to 2030 Census preparations, particularly the reductions of test sites for the upcoming 2026 Census Test from six to two, the disbanding of three expert advisory committees, and agency staffing shortfalls. The Census Bureau must ensure a fair and accurate test ahead of the decennial census.

The proper allocation of federal resources relies on a successful Census. In 2021, 353 federal assistance programs utilized Census data to distribute \$2.8 trillion to Americans via programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, as well as to individual states for vital infrastructure upgrades.¹ Those funds are used for building roads and highways, supporting school breakfast and lunch programs, keeping rural hospitals afloat, and supporting veteran families, among other vital services.² Lacking an accurate count of the U.S. population, federal funds may fail to reach the correct communities.

On November 21, 2024, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report finding the cancellation of tests prior to the 2020 census due to the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in major inaccuracies in capturing a range of social and ethnic groups.³ According to GAO, Black, Native American, and Hispanic Americans, as well as young children, men under 50, and renters were significantly undercounted in 2020. In contrast, non-Hispanic White

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Fact Sheet: The Currency of Our Data: A Critical Input into Federal Funding*, (online at www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/factsheets/2023/comm/factsheet-federal-funding.pdf) (accessed Feb. 6, 2026); U.S. Census Bureau, *Press Release: Uses of Decennial Census Programs Data in Federal Funds Distribution: Fiscal Year 2021* (June 14, 2023) (online at www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2023/decennial-census-federal-funds-distribution.html).

² U.S. Census Bureau, *Press Release: Census Bureau Data Guide More Than \$2.8 Trillion in Federal Funding in Fiscal Year 2021* (June 14, 2023) (online at www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2023/decennial-census-federal-funds-distribution.html); U.S. Census Bureau, *Uses of Decennial Census Programs Data in Federal Funds Distribution: Fiscal Year 2021* (June 2023) (online at www2.census.gov/library/working-papers/2023/decennial/census-data-federal-funds-fy-2021.pdf).

³ Government Accountability Office, *2020 Census: Coverage Errors and Challenges Inform 2030 Plans* (Nov. 21, 2024) (GAO-25-107160) (online at www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-107160).

Americans, individuals over the age of 50, and homeowners were overcounted in the 2020 Census as a proportion of the population. Since Census data bears directly on the apportionment of legislative districts, accurate counts of minority or hard-to-reach populations are essential to fair and equal representation.⁴ In response, on July 22, 2024, the Census Bureau announced the selection of six sites for the 2026 Census Test with an emphasis on “improving the count of hard-to-count and historically undercounted populations.”⁵

However, on February 2, 2026, the Census Bureau announced plans to reduce the number of test sites from six to two—located in Spartanburg, South Carolina, and Huntsville, Alabama.⁶ The specific characteristics of these sites are clearly inadequate to accurately capture minority or hard-to-reach populations. For example, both sites lack tribal regions as well as rural areas with historically undercounted populations and lower self-response rates. As such, it is unclear how the Census Bureau plans to address the historic undercounting of various populations through such a limited assessment. We believe these plans may put the Census Bureau in a poor position to carry out an accurate 2030 Census.

Since the commencement of President Trump’s second term, the Administration has undertaken several actions likely to undermine the Census Bureau’s ability to perform its duties. In March 2025, the Commerce Department dismissed three outside advisory committees who have historically performed vital services for the Census Bureau.⁷ Further reporting indicates significant executive-level and civil servant departures have depleted the Bureau’s leadership and regional offices.⁸ The Commerce Department’s latest announcement of changes to the 2026 Census Test raises additional concerns regarding the prospect of a fair and accurate population count in 2030.⁹

Given the recent steps taken to undermine preparations for a fair and accurate count in 2030, as well as the last-minute nature of these changes, we strongly urge the Census Bureau to

⁴ U.S. Department of Justice, *Guidance under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act* (Apr. 2024) (online at www.justice.gov/d9/2024-04/Section%202%20Guidance%20on%20Redistricting.pdf).

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, *2026 Census Test: Site Selection* (Jul. 22, 2024) (online at www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/newsroom/press-kits/2024/20240722-webinar-slides-2026-census-test-site-selection.pdf); U.S. Census Bureau, *Press Release: Census Bureau Announces Sites for 2026 Census Test* (Jul. 22, 2024) (online at www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2024/2026-census-test-site-selection.html). The six sites were located in: Colorado Springs, Colorado; Huntsville, Alabama; Tribal Lands within Arizona; Spartanburg, South Carolina, Western North Carolina, and Western Texas.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, *Press Release: Census Bureau Statement on 2026 Census Test* (Feb. 2, 2026) (online at www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2026/statement-on-2026-census-test.html).

⁷ *Census Bureau under Trump Cuts Loose Expert Advisers Who Work for Free*, AP (Mar. 4, 2025) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/census-bureau-commerce-department-howard-lutnick-3a56003b790aedce6e6c8ddd7c6b6943>).

⁸ *Brain Drain at Census Bureau has Employees Warning About the Country’s Statistics*, National Public Radio (Apr. 17, 2025) (online at www.npr.org/2025/04/17/nx-s1-5349435/us-census-bureau-data-decennial).

⁹ Federal Register, *2026 Operational Test in Support of the 2030 Census* (Feb. 3, 2025) (online at www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/02/03/2026-02206/agency-information-collection-activities-submission-to-the-office-of-management-and-budget-omb-for).

reverse course and include all six originally selected sites for the 2026 Census Test. We also urge reconsideration of the recent disbanding of the Census Scientific Advisory Committee, 2030 Census Advisory Committee, and National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic, and Other Populations. To assist the Committee in its investigation, please provide responses to the following no later than February 20, 2026:

1. What steps is the Census Bureau taking to reach or accurately sample the following groups or areas in the 2026 Census Test?
 - a. Rural areas with historically undercounted populations and lower self-response rates;
 - b. Areas with a colonia;
 - c. Tribal areas;
 - d. Areas with non-mailable addresses;
 - e. Areas with seasonally vacant housing or high instances of new construction;
 - f. Areas with little to no cellphone or internet service, or minimal administrative record data.
2. What factors were considered in selecting Spartanburg, South Carolina, and Huntsville, Alabama, for the sole test sites of the 2026 Census Test?
3. How many Census Bureau employees have separated from service since January 2025? Please distinguish between executive level, managerial, and non-supervisory positions.
4. How many employees have been hired by the Census Bureau since January 2025 to support the 2026 Census Test?
 - a. Have any employees been reassigned to support the 2026 Census Test? If so, please provide such information.
5. How many individuals are currently employed by the Census Bureau to support the 2026 Census Test? Please distinguish between executive level, managerial and non-supervisory positions.
 - a. How many individuals were hired for enumeration in any of the four sites that were not selected for the 2026 Census Test?¹⁰

¹⁰ The four test sites not selected are: Western Texas; Tribal Lands within Arizona; Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Western North Carolina. See U.S. Census Bureau, *2026 Census Test: Site Selection*, at p. 31 (July 22, 2024) (online at www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/newsroom/press-kits/2024/20240722-webinar-slides-2026-census-test-site-selection.pdf); U.S. Census Bureau, *Census Bureau Statement on 2026 Census Test* (Feb. 2, 2026) (online at www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2026/statement-on-2026-census-test.html).

6. What are the Census Bureau's hiring targets for the 2026 Census Test?
7. Why did the Census Bureau disband the Census Scientific Advisory Committee, 2030 Census Advisory Committee, and National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic, and Other Populations? To what extent, if at all, have the functions of these committees continued within the Census Bureau?
8. What training and resources are provided to enumerators in advance of and during the 2026 Census Test? Please outline all training and resources provided to Postal Service employees who will be participating in the 2026 Census Test.
9. What translation resources, if any, will the Census Bureau include in the 2026 Census Test?
10. What is the content of the in-field enumeration questionnaire for the 2026 Census Test? Please provide a copy of the questionnaire.
11. What funds have been expended related to external outreach, media, and operations related to the four cancelled test sites for the 2026 Census Test?
12. Please also provide a copy of the Census Bureau's detailed test plan for the 2026 Census Test, including an updated test timeline.

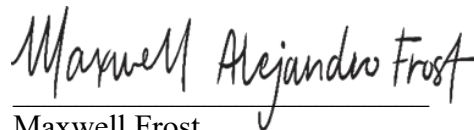
The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. In addition, the Committee has jurisdiction over "Population and demography generally, including the Census."¹¹ If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Robert Garcia
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform



Maxwell Frost
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Economic Growth,
Energy Policy, and Regulatory Affairs

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman

¹¹ House Rule X, clause 1(n)(8).