

2020 CENSUS UNDERCOUNT IS AN EMERGENCY WE CAN CORRECT

By U.S. Representative Ed Case

Sunday, August 30, 2020

As we confront the COVID-19 crisis for a sixth month, we face another emergency with potentially far broader and longer-lasting consequences.

Our U.S. Constitution requires that we count every person living in our country every decade to ensure fair and effective governance. With thirty days to go to Census 2020's September 30th count deadline, our country and Hawai'i are in real danger of a historic undercount. That would be an equally historic mistake locked in for ten years. Here's why and what we all must do now to avoid that result.

First, we must have a full and accurate periodic count to ensure fair and effective governance.

Second, Census data drives the allocation of federal funding. Over 300 federal programs worth an annual \$1.5 trillion, including Medicare and Medicaid, children's health insurance, food stamps and nutritional assistance, housing vouchers, education, school lunch, minority assistance and more, depend on the Census.

This is critical to a small state like Hawai'i, with some 20% of our state budget federally funded. We also have unique needs that are addressed federally, including some of the highest percentages of minorities, first-generation families and veterans. If they are not fully counted, those programs are not fairly funded.

In fact, a George Washington University study estimated that a 1% undercount in the 2010 Census meant an annual loss of over \$16 million for Hawai'i. Worse, undercounts occur more in vulnerable communities, so the consequences compound: those communities do not get fair assistance, they remain marginalized, the undercount repeats, and on.

All critical in normal times, but crucial amidst this devastating pandemic when federal support has provided some stability. The \$3 trillion of CARES Act emergency assistance, with over \$9 billion to Hawai'i, was based largely on 2010 Census data. Undercounts then are still haunting us today.

Third, fair and equal representation of all Americans depends on accurate Census data. The Census determines the allocation of seats in the House of Representatives (and the Electoral College) and the apportionment of a state's population among its congressional districts.

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Census undercounts feed into continued political manipulation of reapportionment, and efforts to frustrate a full count are attempts to deny entire communities of fair and equal representation.

Last year, my House Committee on Appropriations and Subcommittee on Commerce, Science and Justice approved \$7.6 billion for Census 2020.

We have funded further emergency assistance to adjust to COVID-19, and supported the Census' own recommendation to extend the deadline to October 31st to facilitate a full count. Unfortunately, the Administration insists on maintaining the September 30th deadline for the count.

Thirty days out, we are in the danger zone. Our statewide self-response rate is just 61%, 31st among all states, and the counties vary widely: Honolulu 68%; Kaua'i 53%; Maui 52%; and Hawai'i 48%. Whole communities including our most vulnerable are in the bottom fifth undercounted nationwide.

Yes, this is an emergency. But, unlike COVID-19, it is of our own making and we can correct it. Here's how:

If you haven't yet responded, you can do so online (my2020census.gov) or by phone (844-330-2020).

- If you are visited at home by a Census taker, please respond with aloha. They are local community members performing essential work. They have official identification marked with the Census Bureau's logo. They wear face coverings and are trained to observe public health guidelines. If you want to verify identity, call 213-314-6500.
- Whether or not you're pau with your Census, contact your friends, families and communities now and often and ask: "Have you done your Census? Here's how."

Hawaii's path to recovery and prosperity over the next decade depends on the 2020 Census. We have thirty days to make that difference.

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