August 7, 2018

Jennifer Jessup  
Departmental Paperwork Officer  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
14th and Constitution Avenue NW, Room 6616  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Re: Docket number USBC– 2018–0005, Proposed Information Collection; Comment Request;  
2020 Census

Dear Ms. Jessup:

Partners for Each and Every Child, a project of the Opportunity Institute, is an organization focused on advancing equity and excellence for all children in the United States’ educational system. We use the recommendations in the final report of the Congressionally-chartered Equity and Excellence Commission - entitled For Each and Every Child - to advance equity by supporting collaborative, non-partisan education reform efforts. To do so, we connect and support public education stakeholders from across the country.

Our comments in this letter pertain exclusively to the proposed citizenship status question. We believe the highest promise of our educational system depends on full civic engagement, on the rigorous participation of all persons embedded throughout schools, school districts, regions, states, and our nation. Current practice--that is, not including the proposed citizenship question in the census-- is the best way to protect students and their families and support their inclusion and participation in our educational systems. Because the inclusion of this question will threaten full participation in the census, undermine the political representation of the interests of uncounted students, and will needlessly push families and individuals further to the margins, we urge the United States Department of Commerce to remove the proposed citizenship question from the 2020 Census form.

In response to the formal Request for Comments on four questions (section IV of the Notice), we offer the following conclusions and recommendations on question 1, and assert that the proposed citizenship question does not have practical utility and should be removed from the 2020 Census questionnaire.

The purpose of the decennial census is to establish an authoritative count of the persons in each state so that seats in the U.S. House of Representatives may be apportioned among the 50 states according to the population of each of those states. It is important to note that this is a
count of persons, and not of citizens, and that seats in the U.S. House of Representatives are to be apportioned based on total human population, not number of citizens in the population.

We echo in this letter the concerns raised by members of the civil rights community\(^1\) that the inclusion of this question is likely to have a negative impact on the accurate counting of immigrant individuals and their families.

We agree with the service providers and advocates who work closely with immigrant populations and have raised concerns about how the inclusion of a citizenship question in the census will act as a strong disincentive for the participation of immigrant families. We agree with these providers and advocates that immigrant families will be unlikely to answer census questions at all, or to answer them truthfully, out of fear that their participation will be used for their own deportation, and/or those of their loved ones.

These concerns mirror those that have already been raised by many staff within the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Census Bureau, that:

- Adding a citizenship question to the 2020 Census will have an “adverse impact on self-response and, as a result, on the accuracy and quality of the 2020 Census.” (Associate Director for Research and Methodology John Abowd in a January 19, 2018 memorandum to U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross);
- There has already been an “unprecedented” level of “deliberate falsification of the household roster and spontaneous mention of concerns regarding negative attitudes toward immigrants.” (2020 Census pretesting, the Census Bureau’s Center for Survey Measurement);
- Confidentiality concerns “may have a disproportionate impact on an already ‘hard to count’ population: immigrants.” (Census Bureau research staff, qualitative evaluations of the 2017 multilingual pretesting studies, and in additional studies done in 2018);
- Regarding the inclusion of the question, there are significant concerns about “implications for attitudes about the Census Bureau and concerns about confidentiality.” (The Census Bureau’s Census Scientific Advisory Committee, recommendations to Acting Census Director Ron Jarmin following the committee’s 2018 Spring meeting).

The success and sustainability of efforts to improve educational excellence and equity is contingent upon our democracy prioritizing the needs of our most vulnerable students and communities. Robust and thoughtful partnership between and among actors at a federal, state,

\(^1\)https://civilrights.org/leadership-conference-comments-on-proposed-information-collection-on-2020-census-us-docket-usbc-2018-0005/
and local level are necessary to foster and support the active, meaningful, and ongoing participation of vulnerable students and their communities.

Immigrant families are as deserving of a high-quality public education as any group of students in our system. There are millions of citizens, especially children, living in mixed status households, who easily could decline to respond or be left out of the census if others in the household (e.g. Temporary Protected Status holders; undocumented residents; “Dreamers”) fear the consequences of filling out the form. For these reasons, self-response among households comprised of both citizen and non-citizen members (headed either by non-citizens or citizens) could decline, further putting data quality and census accuracy at risk. To knowingly compromise the full participation of these students and their families would be a disservice to our educational system and to our moral and civic commitments as Americans.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the questions to be asked in the 2020 Census and to ensure that the voices of community members dedicated to equity and excellence in education continue to be heard in this important ongoing national conversation. If you have any questions about these comments, please contact Guy Johnson, Senior Program Director, at 510-214-6786 or guy@theopportunityinstitute.org.

Sincerely,

Molly Mauer
Executive Vice President, Opportunity Institute
Director, Partners for Each and Every Child