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Testimony on 2020 Census – Secretary of State 2020-2021 Budget Hearing

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The Center for Public Policy Priorities is an independent public policy organization. CPHP uses data and analysis to advocate for policy solutions that enable all Texans to reach their full potential. We envision a Texas where everyone is healthy, well-educated, and financially secure. To help reach this vision, the state should invest and commit to a robust 2020 Census plan to ensure every Texan is counted.

The Census is a constitutionally mandated count of the nation’s residents. The 2020 Census will affect our representation in Congress, our federal funding for health care, housing, education, and transportation, and private-sector investments in our economy and infrastructure. A George Washington University report estimates that even a one-percent undercount could result in a \$300 million federal loss for Texas per year in five state budget programs supporting health care, child welfare, and child care. The burden will fall on state taxes to fill in the funding gaps for the next decade.

In the past, Texas Governors Clements and Bush issued executive orders to promote Census outreach by establishing Complete Count Committees or directing specific agencies such as the Secretary of State’s office to develop and implement Census information, including a Texas 2000 Census website. Other states have already committed to investing in an accurate count. For Texas to not fall behind, we must both invest and commit to a sound 2020 Census state-wide plan.

Four states have been implementing robust Census outreach efforts by 1) establishing a statewide Complete Count Committee and 2) allocating state funds to Census outreach efforts. Other states have provided one or the other, but a state as large and diverse as Texas needs both.

Census outreach efforts such as Complete Count Committees do not have to be expensive, complex campaigns. For example, in 2017, Georgia allocated a one-time amount of \$2.25 million towards Census outreach. These funds were used to develop a website to prepare and educate residents on the 2020 Census and to support local communities’ Census outreach efforts. The state was able to incorporate already prepared documents from the Census Bureau on the site, making it a straightforward and valuable resource in spreading 2020 Census information.

Georgia, like Texas, contains “hard to count” communities. These are communities that have low response rates to the Census and require targeted outreach to make sure they are counted. In 2010, significant undercounts for Texas occurred in rural communities, large metropolitan areas, college towns, and communities along the Texas/Mexico border. Funding from the state will make it possible for these communities to have a targeted outreach effort and likely reduce an undercount.

We recommend that the 2019 Legislature fund Census outreach at least at the level of funding Georgia has provided. We believe the Secretary of State’s office is the best agency to implement a 2020 Census outreach plan and would be ideal to distribute state funds to local communities to increase participation and awareness of the 2020 Census. It is in the best interest of our great state to have a complete count.

About CPHP

The Center for Public Policy Priorities is an independent public policy organization that uses research, analysis and advocacy to promote solutions that enable Texans of all backgrounds to reach their full potential. Learn more at CPHP.org.