



**American Planning Association**

*Making Great Communities Happen*

April 6, 2018

The Honorable Wilbur Ross  
Secretary of Commerce  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

On behalf of the American Planning Association (APA), I am writing to urge you to reconsider and reverse the decision to include a new and untested citizenship question to the 2020 Census. Planners are critical stakeholders in the census process. Good planning is reliant on high-quality, accurate data. APA is concerned that the inclusion of a new and untested question at this late stage undermines the diligent preparations that have already gone into the 2020 Census and has great potential to undermine our shared goal of a full, comprehensive count of all communities.

Design of the upcoming census began in 2010, and since then all aspects of the census have undergone intense scrutiny and analysis to determine and prevent attrition in participation. The inclusion of this question, however, has not undergone such scrutiny and experts on both sides of the aisle agree that its inclusion this late in the process would drastically reduce the likelihood of an accurate count in communities across the nation.

Maintaining and improving [federal data is a major priority](#) for APA because planners throughout the country are entrusted to help local residents and leaders make strategic decisions. Good decisions are well-informed decisions that are based on access to high-quality federal data that is both accurate and fair. Achieving a comprehensive count of all people aids the effective allocation of grant funding and smart local decision making regarding economic development initiatives.

Potential inaccuracies from the proposed change could have grave consequences on the states and communities facing the biggest impacts of economic, social, and demographic shifts. Not fully understanding the realities about where people actually live does not change that reality. It only undermines the ability of local leaders to make thoughtful, informed decisions.

A census undercount will cause real harm to communities. Planners and local officials need an accurate understanding of key social, economic, and demographic conditions. The addition of the proposed question threatens our ability to help citizens and policymakers make the choices

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necessary to address our biggest challenges – jobs, education, economic development, affordable housing, and poverty.

There is no replacement for the data resources provided by the Census Bureau. The decennial count will impact local decision making, as well as a range of program funding for the next decade. The repercussions of an inaccurate count are significant. So significant, that it is simply too risky to introduce a new question at this stage.

We urge the Commerce Department to reverse this decision in the interests of a truly successful, comprehensive census. APA is committed to working toward a fair and accurate census that helps us meet the challenges our country and our communities face. A fair and accurate census is an important foundation for expanding opportunity for all. Thank you for your consideration of this request and service to the nation's communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cynthia A. Bowen" followed by a horizontal line.

Cynthia Bowen, AICP  
President, American Planning Association

