



March 12, 2020

**MEMORANDUM FOR:** Dr. Steven Dillingham  
Director  
U.S. Census Bureau

**FROM:** Peggy E. Gustafson  
Inspector General

**SUBJECT:** Request for Information Pursuant to the Inspector General Act  
of 1978, as Amended

Today, March 12, 2020, marks the first day that U.S. households begin receiving official Census Bureau (Bureau) mail with detailed information on how to respond to the 2020 Census, the constitutionally-mandated count of the entire U.S. population. This mailing is the critical first step of several invitations to households to participate in the 2020 Census, a process fundamental to our democracy as it will “determine congressional representation, inform hundreds of billions in federal funding every year, and provide data that will impact communities for the next decade.”<sup>1</sup>

However, the 2020 Census kickoff coincides with a time of unprecedented turmoil and uncertainty, as the country is responding to an outbreak of respiratory disease caused by a coronavirus known as COVID-19. Yesterday, the World Health Organization characterized the outbreak as a pandemic,<sup>2</sup> and last evening the President addressed the nation to announce significant international travel restrictions.<sup>3</sup> As of noon today, the Centers for Disease Control has reported 1,215 cases in the United States<sup>4</sup> and—in testimony yesterday, before the House Oversight and Reform Committee—Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, warned that “things will get worse than they are right now.”<sup>5</sup>

The Bureau issued a statement yesterday addressing the impact of the COVID-19 on the 2020 Census. It noted, among other matters, the Bureau’s focus on two key principles: the health and safety of Bureau staff and the public, and the fulfillment of the Bureau’s Constitutional obligation to deliver the 2020 Census counts on time.<sup>6</sup> Although it may be true that

<sup>1</sup> <https://2020census.gov/en/census-data.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-address-nation/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/03/11/814460233/coronavirus-1-000-cases-now-in-u-s-and-it-s-going-to-get-worse-fauci-says>

<sup>6</sup> <https://2020census.gov/en/news-events/press-releases/statement-coronavirus.html>

“[i]t has never been easier to respond [to the Decennial Census] on your own, whether online, over the phone or by mail—all without having to meet a census taker,” in less than a month “Census takers plan to conduct the Nonresponse Followup operation in a handful of communities beginning as early as April 9, and across the country on May 13.”<sup>7</sup> However, the statement provided little explanation for contingency plans: “If we need to delay or discontinue nonresponse [N]onresponse [F]ollowup visits in a particular community, we will adapt our operation to ensure we get a complete and accurate count.”<sup>8</sup>

In order to assist our ongoing oversight of the 2020 Census—and, in particular, the Bureau’s contingency planning for a major public health emergency—please provide answers to the following questions, along with all relevant documentation, by Friday, March 20, 2020:

- What contingency plans does the Bureau have in place to fully conduct the 2020 Census during a major health crisis?
- What plans does the Bureau have to address a situation where social distancing measures become widespread—and households become reluctant, or refuse altogether, to engage with enumerators as part of the Nonresponse Followup operation?
- What training, if any, has the Bureau prepared to provide to staff and enumerators during a health crisis, when social distancing is one mitigating measure that households might take?
- What communications, if any, has the Bureau provided staff and enumerators regarding foreseeable challenges in the 2020 Census, given that it will now occur during a major health crisis?
- Will enumerators be provided with personal protective equipment (PPE) for use during enumeration? If so, what specific PPE will they be issued—and have they been, or will they be, trained in the proper use of PPE?

In addition, you may also produce any additional documentation or information deemed relevant to this request for information.

The Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, guarantees the OIG “timely access to all records, reports, audits, reviews, documents, papers, recommendations, or other materials available” to the Department,<sup>9</sup> and authorizes the Inspector General “to make such investigations and reports relating to the administration of the programs and operations of [the Department] as are, in the judgment of the Inspector General, necessary or desirable[.]”<sup>10</sup> Further, you are obligated to cooperate with this request. Department Administrative Order 213-2, § 4.03 states that “[i]t is Department policy that all employees fully cooperate with the

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> 5 U.S.C. App. § 6(a)(1)(A).

<sup>10</sup> 5 U.S.C. App. § 6(a)(2).

OIG so that each inspection and evaluation may be promptly conducted and brought to an appropriate conclusion,” and that “Departmental officials shall make every effort to assist the OIG in achieving the objective of effective inspections and evaluations.” Similarly, Department Organization Order 10-13, § 4.01 states that “[t]he officers and employees of the Department shall cooperate fully with the officials and employees of the OIG and shall provide such information, assistance, and support without delay as is needed for the OIG to properly carry out the provisions of the [Inspector General] Act [of 1978].”

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at (202) 482-4661.

cc: Karen Dunn Kelley, Deputy Secretary of Commerce