



May 1, 2018

The Census is Important!

Bradford M. Berry is general counsel of the NAACP, and he wrote an important article recently in The Washington Post. He said, in part:

“Millions of Americans are rightly outraged by the Trump administration’s recent decision to include a citizenship question in the 2020 Census — which, if allowed to stand, will surely reduce participation in the census by immigrant communities. But the risk facing the 2020 Census, and the stakes for communities of color, are much greater than the citizenship question alone.

“With fewer than two years to go before the count, the U.S. Census Bureau is alarmingly understaffed, underfunded and underprepared for its constitutionally mandated population survey. That’s why the NAACP is suing the federal government to demand that it immediately step up its preparations, especially with respect to communities of color.

“Concerns about the census are nothing new. Under our system of government, we have long known that those who aren’t counted don’t count for purposes of drawing legislative districts and distributing federal dollars. But the risks tied to the 2020 survey are especially worrisome.

“By the bureau’s own estimate, the 2010 Census did not account for 1.5 million black and Hispanic residents nationwide. The systemic and disproportionate undercounting of communities of color deprives us of badly needed federal resources for medical care, K-12 education, housing and transportation while diminishing our ability to be heard politically. The undercount affects the quality of life in communities of color every day.

“If the Census Bureau continues down its current path, the 2020 undercount will be unprecedentedly severe. History tells us that communities of color will be hurt the most. The original Constitution mandated that enslaved Africans be counted as three-fifths of a person. The three-fifths clause was abolished after the Civil War, but the government has continued to disproportionately undercount African Americans.”

In my view, there is now a huge debate about how many immigrants will actually be counted after the Trump administration proposed asking a question about citizenship on the census form. But, the census has a problem well beyond the count of immigrants. We must consider all of the people who feel disenfranchised and unseen by their government, including those experiencing homelessness and are doubled up sleeping on family members’ couches; citizens returning to their communities from corrections; the many who are unemployed; and the many people who feel that their government is just not looking out for them. The census is much less

likely to count all of these people because they will not answer the census questions because they have lost hope in the promise of America.

Perhaps the best way the government can have an accurate census is to work so everyone in our country feels that their government is working for them. We have to fight to make that a reality, but at the same time we have to fight for the most accurate census possible – making sure that everyone is counted so we can get our fair share of the resources that are vitally needed by our communities.

I will be setting up a 2020 Census Task Force in my office to begin the conversation about the importance of the upcoming count. The goal of the Task Force will be to get people from the community to help devise a strategic plan to make sure everyone is counted and no federal dollars are diverted from the West Side. We need major developments on the West Side of Chicago, and a misrepresentation of the count will hurt the West Side for the next 10 years. Please email me at repford@lashawnford.com if you are interested.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LSF', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District