

# The 2020 Census: Concerns About Undercounting and the Effects on Human Services

The U.S. Constitution directs, by Article I, Section 2, that a Census take place every ten years: “Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States...according to their respective Numbers....The actual Enumeration shall be made within three Years after the first meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent Term of ten Years.”

Designed to be a simple count of the population, the first census took place in 1790. Over time, it has become highly political because the underlying implementing laws<sup>1</sup> do not dictate precisely what questions or areas of inquiry are to be included. What is required is that the Census Bureau must notify Congress of the general census subjects it intends to address three years prior to the census. Congress must be notified of the specific questions to be asked two years prior to the census. This decennial’s principal controversy involves a question seeking to ascertain whether or not each respondent is a citizen. The census has not asked this question since 1950. The Justice Department says it is needed in order to properly enforce the Voting Rights Act. At least 18 state attorneys general have sued the Census Bureau and the Commerce Department over the plan to add the citizenship question. Anticipating that some undocumented immigrants will not answer the question, there is concern about the resulting accuracy of the census.

Putting partisan politics aside, if there is an undercount, some social scientists are concerned that we will not have an accurate snapshot of the socioeconomic characteristics of the country. Using flawed data would improperly result in unfair disbursements of money and funding of certain human services and welfare programs. These would include such things as the Disabilities Education Act, Head Start, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, the Child Care Development Block Grant—Discretionary, the Social Services Block Grant, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, and Title 1 Grants to Local Education Agencies. In terms of child welfare, the Annie E. Casey Foundation makes some recommendations to achieve a more accurate Census:

■ “Maximize the Census Bureau’s capacity: Federal legislators need to fully fund the Census outreach effort, and the



1790 Census map.

administration needs to appoint a qualified and permanent director to lead the agency to provide support for a more accurate Census than in 2010.

- Fund state and local outreach: State and local governments and community organizations need to invest in educational outreach around the Census to ensure that the most vulnerable communities are counted.
- Expand the pool of trusted messengers: Broaden the circle of people (from child care providers to members of the clergy) and organizations (from public schools to libraries) who can provide outreach in their communities

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## Julie Springwater Receives NSDTA Career Achievement Award

**N**SDTA proudly honored Julie Springwater as its 2018 recipient of the Career Achievement Award last September at the annual conference in Columbus, OH.

Julie is the Executive Director of the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors. This one-of-a-kind organization was created in 1984 by agency leaders and exists solely for the purpose of supporting the work of child protective service executives and leaders in New England. With the support of the Judge Baker Children Center, Mrs. Springwater hosts biannual meetings with the six Commissioners/Directors from the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont to share practice innovation and learn cutting-edge initiatives in the child welfare field. The meetings also allow agency leaders to stay abreast of federal legislation and mandates.

The New England Association, under Julie's leadership, recognizes

the role continuous quality improvement and workforce development play in the successful implementation of any practice change. To that end, Mrs. Springwater also meets regularly with training and continuous quality improvement leaders to collaborate on best practices, changes in legislation and policies, and the implementation of training and workforce development strategies. Federal staff is regularly consulted and often participates in meetings with agency staff.

Julie's commitment to child welfare, training, and achieving positive outcomes for children and families began 45 years ago when she held a variety of direct service positions at the Department of Social Services (DSS) in Massachusetts (now Department of Children and Families). As a social worker, adoption worker, and family resource worker, she recognized the need for professional



training for all staff as well as foster and adoptive parents. Mrs. Springwater has had a fundamental impact on the overall professionalism of foster and adoptive family resources starting at DSS with her role as Foster Parent Training Coordinator in the mid-1980s.

Julie created the New England Youth Coalition, a coalition of young people who had experienced out-of-home placement and now wished to serve as advocates and leaders in their respective states. With her passion for youth leadership, she supported the development of this group both organizationally as well as individually. She cultivated and helped nurture youth members to step into leadership roles so that the organization could truly become a thriving and sustainable youth-led coalition.

Congratulations once again to Julie Springwater for a well-deserved recognition! 📌

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to reach hard-to-count households and encourage participation among people most likely to be missed.

- Address the digital divide: Provide online access for all families to participate in the Census, either in local libraries or schools.
- Address privacy and confidentiality concerns: Given the growing distrust and fear of online data breaches, it is critical that government officials ensure the protection of respondents' data."<sup>2</sup>

Everyone acknowledges that a census is imperfect. Keeping response rates high is challenging. Homeless people are not easy to count, nor are people who do not want to be counted. No census of a large country's population can successfully collect absolutely accurate information from every person. This being the case, methodologies must be developed to adjust the results to gauge any undercount and offer the most accurate estimate of the total population's characteristics. 📌

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#### Reference Notes

1. See <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2007-title13/pdf/USCODE-2007-title13.pdf>
2. See <https://www.aecf.org/blog/one-million-missing-undercount-of-young-kids-in-2020-Census-threatens-gains/>