



# WASHINGTON NONPROFITS

We make sure nonprofits have what they need to succeed.

January 17, 2018

Senator Maria Cantwell  
511 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cantwell,

I am writing on behalf of the broad membership of Washington Nonprofits to express concern regarding a question proposed for inclusion in the 2020 U.S. Census.

According to an article from ProPublica on December 29, 2017<sup>1</sup>, the U.S. Department of Justice has asked U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and the Census Bureau to include a question in the 2020 Census about citizenship status. This effort creates unnecessary fear across the country among immigrant communities and will deeply limit participation by those communities. Washington Nonprofits is strongly opposed to the addition of such a question for several reasons.

First, the Annual Community Survey already includes a question on immigration and citizenship status, which means that asking such a question in the upcoming census is redundant. However, we do feel the current use of a similar question in the Annual Community Survey is sufficient to address the concerns of the justice Department related to the Voting Rights Act and the potential dilution of minority voices and participation in our democracy.

Second, we feel that the addition of a citizenship question will depress responses to the census among many Washington residents. If a citizenship query did depress responses, as experts have predicted<sup>2</sup>, it could have serious ramifications for the distribution of federal resources as well as the data available for nonprofits and governments to address community needs.

Third, census questions undergo an extensive vetting process that includes trials and other research to ensure that a query elicits an accurate response without unwanted side effects -- this is the effective process that illuminated the problems with a tribal enrollment question. In contrast to the established vetting process, the Census Bureau must submit a final list of questions to Congress in less than three months -- on April 1-- and will conduct only one major field test of the census process this spring. Quite simply, the vetting process will be rushed with

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<sup>1</sup> "Trump Justice Department Pushes for Citizenship Question on Census, Alarming Experts." Justin Elliott. ProPublica. December 29, 2017. <https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-justice-department-pushes-for-citizenship-question-on-census-alarming-experts>

<sup>2</sup> "Adding Citizenship Question Risks 'Bad Count' For 2020 Census, Experts Warn." Hansi Lo Wang. NPR. January 10, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/01/10/575145554/adding-citizenship-question-risks-bad-count-for-2020-census-experts-warn>



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the last-minute addition of a citizenship question to the census. Including a new question so late in the process effectively offers no opportunity to test and correct wording problems.

Washington Nonprofits is asking that you strongly oppose the addition of a last minute, unvetted, and potentially damaging question about immigration/citizenship status to the 2020 Census before Commerce Secretary Ross, and in congressional committee work.

Please feel free to contact us for any follow up regarding this critical issue for communities across Washington.

Sincerely,

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