



Testimony of

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Before the
New York State Complete Count Commission Hearing

Regarding
Strategies to ensure a complete and accurate count of hard-to-count populations

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Good evening. Thank you, Secretary Rosado, President Malatras, and members of the Commission for holding these important public hearings across the state to ensure an accurate 2020 Census.

My name is Sophia Halkitis. I am a native New Yorker from Queens and a data analyst at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. Citizens' Committee for Children is an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization and proud member of the New York Counts 2020 Coalition. At Citizens' Committee for Children, we work to ensure every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe. This brings me to my purpose for being here today.

In many ways, our mission at Citizens' Committee for Children starts and ends with accurate data on children and families in New York City and New York State. Census data fuels every aspect of the work: our public education programs, policy advocacy, research, and the Census data available through our online database, *Keeping Track Online*.¹ While our organization does not accept government funding, we advocate for government funds to support all New York children, including the schools they attend, the programs that serve and elevate them, the hospitals they visit, and the government that represents them. As you are aware, a full and accurate 2020 Census is an integral component for how federal, state, and local governments distribute funds to support programs for young children. We are concerned substitution methods employed to account for households that do not respond to the census, such as proxy interviews, may be detrimental to an accurate count. Employing these methods make it more likely that the estimates we will use for the next ten years may be inaccurate and risk an undercount of young children, which makes motivating families to complete their census forms of paramount importance.²

Much attention has been placed on the addition of an unvetted question on citizenship undermining a full and accurate decennial census and we share this concern. Yet in addition to this deeply concerning inclusion of a citizenship question, there are several demographic groups who historically have been undercounted, including and especially young children—those under five years of age. In fact, young children had a higher net undercount than any other age group in the 2010, census and this undercount has worsened significantly since 1980, while the net undercount rate for other age groups have improved.³ Inaccurate data on children and families has far reaching consequences for everyone, including significant cuts to federal programs that support children and families, overcrowded classrooms, understaffed hospital emergency rooms, more kids without health care, less representation in congress, and continued difficulty meeting people's transportation needs.⁴

As part of Citizens' Committee community-based assessments, we have heard from parents with young children in several communities in New York City about the daily challenges they face, as well as the community resources that support the well-being of their children and families. As part of our own Census outreach in collaboration with our partners at New York Counts 2020, we have also heard from child and family advocates about their questions and concerns about how best to ensure an accurate count for the 2020 Census. Like you, Citizens' Committee for Children has been looking for multiple strategies to ensure a full and accurate count of all New Yorkers, especially families with young children. Based on our experiences speaking with parents of young children and service providers, we recommend the following to help ensure a complete count of children and families:

- 1) **Target census outreach in spaces where children and families already visit.** We know from our community-based assessments throughout New York City that parents and caregivers of young children feel stressed and strained to meet the needs of all members of their family. By integrating Census outreach efforts into the spaces that they visit regularly—schools, doctors' offices, child care centers, recreational spaces and other spaces that families visit—families can learn about the importance of completing their census form without deviating from their already busy routines. The Census Bureau's 2014 working paper on the undercount of young children echoes this suggestion, and the task force recommends that outreach and promotion for the 2020 Census be directed to agencies working with parents and young children.⁵ Throughout our community-based assessments, we've also learned that caregivers of young children prefer to access information from local trusted peers and service providers they already have relationships with, reinforcing the notion of equipping those local service providers with tools and information about the census. As stated by our partners at KIDS

COUNT, "service providers and others who routinely interact with families are an untapped resource that could potentially act in this capacity [increasing participating among people most likely to be missed]. For example, establishing and strengthening strategic partnerships with medical providers who serve parents of newborns could be particularly effective in increasing parents' awareness about including every child on the census form." Early Head Start and Head Start Programs; medical providers including dentists and pediatricians; public program offices for Medicaid, SNAP, and WIC; houses of worship; public schools, libraries, and community centers are examples of potential sites for outreach to ensure a complete count of young children.⁶ These strategies are also identified in a series of focus groups with parents of young children conducted by our partners at the New York State Council on Children and Families which identifies key information on motivators and deterrents for families completing their census form and can be used as a resource for determining messaging strategies in this community.⁷

We are aware of the changes that were made to the 2020 Census to improve the undercount of young children, such as redesigning the form to provide more clarity on counting children, updating enumerator training materials, and the Census Bureau's Statistics In Schools Program, but these efforts may not be enough on their own to ameliorate the severe undercount of young children.⁸ These efforts, paired with targeted materials in the hands of service providers that interact with families, and media campaigns that feature effective messaging for caregivers on the media they consume most often, will be critically important in ensuring a complete count of young children.

- 2) **Disseminate clear and concise technical information about Census forms.** Many community-based organizations and advocacy organizations throughout New York City and State are poised to carry out the organizing and outreach it will take to achieve a full count. But their efforts to educate are limited by the information available from the Census Bureau. During CCC's census event and hearing from library staff, we learned that service providers and librarians who are engaging in census work feel uninformed about the census form itself and what resources will be available to them. These on the ground staff need clear and accurate information about the Census form questions, the mail form, accessing and navigating the online interface, and other technical details to anticipate where people will likely encounter difficulty with accurately completing their census form in order to train their outreach staff and establish messaging for their constituents.
- 3) **Partner with New York's non-profit community.** We appreciate the allocation of \$20 million in the state budget for outreach and believe that this money would be best spent by investing in community-based organizations and libraries to do on-the-ground outreach and education in the communities where they've already established relationships.⁹ Funding non-profits and local community-based organizations to do census work is critical in achieving an accurate count, as they have developed deep relationships that makes them trusted ambassadors of the census in their communities and can offer spaces for people to complete their census forms. **To do this most effectively, more information is needed about what the state's outreach plan is so that community groups can support and supplement those efforts.** More detailed information is also needed to understand how funding will be distributed.

Thank you, Secretary Rosado, President Malatras, and members of the Commission for your commitment to consider public input into developing a strategy to ensure a complete count for New York State.

¹ Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, *Keeping Track Online*. <https://data.ccnnewyork.org/>

² U.S. Census Bureau (2014). *The Undercount of Young Children*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2014/demo/2014-undercount-children.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ See also George Washington Institute of Public Policy (2019). *Counting for Dollars 2020: The Role of the Decennial Census in the Geographic Distribution of Federal Funds*. Retrieved from https://gwipp.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2181/f/downloads/IPP-1819-3%20CountingforDollars_NY.pdf

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau (2014).

⁶ Annie E. Casey Foundation (2018). *KIDS COUNT Data Book*. Retrieved from <https://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-2018kidscountdatabook-2018.pdf>

⁷ New York State Council for Children and Families. *The 2020 Census is Important to New York*. Retrieved from https://www.ccf.ny.gov/files/8815/4688/4221/NYS_Census_Brief.pdf

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau (2019). *Investigating the 2010 Undercount of Young Children: Summary of Recent Research*. Retrieved from <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/final-analysis-reports/2020-report-2010-undercount-children-summary-recent-research.pdf>

⁹ See also New York City Council (2019). *Response to the Fiscal 2020 Preliminary Budget and Fiscal 2019 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report*. Retrieved from https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2019/04/Fiscal-2020-Preliminary-Budget-Response_FINAL.pdf