

An Accurate Census Helps Strengthen Our National Security

Effective allocation of federal dollars helps bolster national security, community safety and the well-being of children.

The United States Constitution mandates that the federal government count all residents every 10 years in what is often called the largest peacetime mobilization. This decennial census produces a basic picture of who lives in the United States. Over \$800 billion in federal funding—including money spent on education, nutrition, and health-related services—is driven by data collected in the census; thus, its accuracy is critical.¹ Young children under age five, particularly those from disadvantaged families, are the age group most likely to be undercounted, with one million missed in the last census in 2010.² To conduct an accurate census, the U.S. Census Bureau must be adequately funded. This will ensure the effective allocation of funding for critical programs that help young children grow up prepared to succeed in the military or in any career they choose.

An accurate census can enhance national security

Our national security depends on qualified young adults who are ready, willing, and able to serve in the U.S. military. However, 71 percent of all young Americans are currently ineligible from qualifying for service due to educational deficits, health issues such as obesity, and behavior problems such as

substance abuse or involvement in the criminal justice system.³ Children from disadvantaged families are particularly likely to experience difficulties that can disqualify them for later military service. Federally-funded programs that rely on census data such as the National School Lunch Program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Head Start, and Early Head Start can help prevent problems among disadvantaged children that would otherwise disqualify them from military service.⁴ Without an accurate census, funds for these and other programs may be misallocated, and the valuable resources from these programs will fail to reach the constituency that needs them the most.

An Accurate 2020 Census is Threatened

With new data collection methods that are largely untested and funding that is short of what the Census Bureau needs, the 2020 census is facing enormous challenges.⁵ The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) put the census on its “High Risk” list and enumerated several factors that must be addressed.⁶ As one example, to reduce costs, the Census Bureau for the first time in 2020 will utilize technology to collect responses from households to decrease the number of

census workers going door to door. However, due to funding constraints, the Census Bureau canceled several field tests for the new technology, including those intended to assess response rates in rural, hard-to-count communities. Without this testing, the Census Bureau is unable to properly evaluate which tactics are effective and which need improvement. As a result, the risk of an undercount of disadvantaged children persists, as well as the risk of other data errors.

Congress must act to ensure an accurate census

Because the distribution of more than \$800

billion annually depends on decennial census data, it is imperative that Congress prioritize funding for the 2020 Census. Adequately funding the census now could save *billions* in wasteful, inefficient spending by the federal government over the next decade, and the retired admirals and generals of Mission: Readiness are mobilizing in support of this critical peacetime effort. Without sufficient investment in this foundational duty established in the Constitution, we risk our country's future national security and the safety and well-being of our children.

¹ <https://gwipp.gwu.edu/counting-dollars-role-decennial-census-geographic-distribution-federal-funds>

² <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2014/demo/2014-undercount-children.pdf>

³ Department of Defense. (2017). Qualified Military Available (QMA). Acquired from the Accession Policy and Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies teams at DoD in November 2017.

⁴ <https://www.strongnation.org/articles/420-why-early-care-and-education-is-a-national-security-imperative;>
<https://www.strongnation.org/articles/14-retreat-is-not-an-option>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ http://www.gao.gov/highrisk/2020_decennial_census/why_did_study#t=2

Mission: Readiness

Retired admirals and generals strengthening national security by ensuring kids stay in school, stay fit, and stay out of trouble.

Council for a Strong America is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites five organizations comprised of law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, pastors, and prominent coaches and athletes who promote solutions that ensure our next generation of Americans will be citizen-ready.

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