



City of San Antonio

Legislation Details (With Text)

File #: 18-3902

Type: Staff Briefing - Without Ordinance

In control: Intergovernmental Relations Committee

On agenda: 6/13/2018

Title: Briefing on the 2020 census and possible action to approve a proposed resolution of opposition to inclusion of the 2020 census citizenship question [Jeff Coyle, Director, Government & Public Affairs; Megan Dodge, Assistant Director, Government & Public Affairs]

Sponsors:

Indexes:

Code sections:

Attachments: 1. Draft Census Resolution_IGR_FINAL, 2. Staff Presentation_Census

| Date | Ver. | Action By | Action | Result |
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DEPARTMENT: Government and Public Affairs

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Jeff Coyle, Director

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: City Wide

SUBJECT:

A brief overview of the 2020 Census and consideration of a proposed resolution opposing the inclusion of a citizenship question in the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2020 Census questionnaire.

SUMMARY:

The Intergovernmental Relations Committee will receive a brief overview of the 2020 Census, to include the City’s planning efforts in anticipation of the 2020 Census. The Committee will also consider a proposed resolution expressing opposition to the inclusion of a citizenship question in the 2020 Census due to the impact such a question would have on the accuracy of the count as required by the U.S. Constitution.

BACKGROUND:

The U.S. Constitution requires a complete census of the population of the United States every 10 years.

Preparations for the 2020 Census have begun, with Census Day to occur on April 1, 2020. Obtaining an accurate count for San Antonio is important for several reasons. First, it helps determine the distribution of more than \$675 billion annually in federal funds to state, local and tribal governments; this funding is for housing, highways, hospitals, schools, assistance programs and many other projects and programs. It also informs redistricting, determines apportionment of representatives to the US House of Representatives, forecasts future transportation needs, determines eligibility for housing assistance programs and assists government entities in planning and implementing programs and services and others. Following the 2010 Census, Texas gained four congressional seats and due to its rapid growth, is expected to receive more following the 2020 Census.

In 2020, individuals will be able to complete the census questionnaire online, by phone or by mail for the first time, reducing the reliance on household visits. In past years, individuals could only complete the census form via mail or in-person. The first day for residents to self-respond is March 23, 2020 and census day is April 1. For the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau plans to reduce census field canvassing by 70 percent and place more emphasis on online/telephone responses.

On December 12, 2017, the Department of Justice (DOJ) submitted a letter to U.S. Census Bureau requesting the Bureau include a question regarding citizenship on the 2020 Census questionnaire. The DOJ requested the question to obtain more accurate data on citizen voting-age population for their efforts to enforce the Voting Rights Act. On March 26, 2018, the Department of Commerce Secretary, Wilbur Ross, directed the Census Bureau to include the citizenship question in the 2020 Census. The questions to be included in the census are at the administrative discretion of the Secretary of Commerce and no additional Congressional action is necessary to add the question. In order to make changes to the proposed questionnaire, Congress would have to pass a law instructing the Census Bureau to change the questionnaire.

Since the announcement of the inclusion of a citizenship question, several states, cities, advocacy organizations and individuals have filed lawsuits challenging the questions' inclusion in the census. Five separate lawsuits have been filed against the Census Bureau and Commerce Department to block the inclusion of this question. The filed lawsuits generally make two arguments: (1) that including a citizenship question will cause reduced participation and result in an undercount of the population and therefore unconstitutionally affecting Congressional representation and funding, and (2) claiming that the decision did not follow procedure and is not in accordance with the law. The lawsuit filed on June 5 by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) alleges inclusion of the question would depress census participation and reduce the amount of federal funds that are distributed in communities such as San Antonio and Houston, Texas.

ISSUE:

2020 Census Overview

The Government and Public Affairs Department will facilitate a strategy designed to help ensure San Antonio residents participate in the census, working with other City departments, the Mayor's Office, Council offices and key stakeholders. This summer, the City will work with key stakeholders to develop the strategy for

obtaining a complete count.

Earlier this year, a representative from the US Census Bureau met with City staff and explained the important role a Complete Count Committee will play in achieving an accurate count in the 2020 Census. A CCC's role is to plan and implement locally-based outreach campaigns to raise awareness of the census and ultimately drive participation in the census. The City of San Antonio will work with Bexar County to form a CCC to conduct community outreach on the importance of participating in the census, while engaging key stakeholders.

To obtain an accurate count, local outreach efforts will seek to inform all residents about the importance of the census, while focusing on areas with low response rates from the 2010 census. According to an analysis by the Texas Tribune, 66 percent of the Texas residents live in census tracts that exceed the national average for low response scores. Based on Census Bureau statistics from 2010 and other census tract variables, on average, nearly 24% of San Antonio residents are not likely to self-respond in 2020. There are several variables that can lead to a low response score, including previous response rates and the following characteristics: immigrant, renter occupied units, limited English proficiency, households below poverty, lack of a high school diploma, and the age groups of 0-5 and 18-24 years of age. The American Community Survey estimates that approximately 205,000 San Antonio residents are foreign born, of which 128,000 are non-citizens. Additionally, roughly 44% of local residents speak a language other than English at home.

Citizenship question

The Census Bureau last included a citizenship question during a full census in 1950. Since then, data on citizenship has been obtained through a sampling of households on the census long form or the American Community Survey, which not every household receives. Including a citizenship question in the short form to be completed by all households is likely to impact response rates among immigrant groups resulting in inaccurate population counts, especially in states with large immigrant populations like Texas, California, and Florida.

On January 26, 2018, five former directors of the US Census Bureau, serving under both Republican and Democratic administrations, expressed concern about including a citizenship question in the 2020 Census. The letter expresses concern that the question was added late in the process to test new questions leading up to a census and that adding this question at this point in the process “would put the accuracy of the enumeration and success of the census in all communities at grave risk.” Cities including McAllen, Texas and Los Angeles, California have adopted resolutions opposing the citizenship question and numerous organizations have expressed concern, including the US Conference of Mayors, National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO) and other immigrant and civil rights organizations.

As a city and state with a large Hispanic population and a significant nonresponse rate in certain census tracts, San Antonio and Texas are at risk of an undercount should participation decline due to the inclusion of a citizenship question on the 2020 Census. Through a resolution in opposition of including a citizenship question in the 2020 Census, the City of San Antonio will join the dozens of advocacy organizations, local and state governments in advocating for a complete count as required by federal law.

ALTERNATIVES:

The Intergovernmental Relations Committee could decide not to pass the proposed resolution opposing the inclusion of a citizenship question in the 2020 Census.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This resolution poses no direct fiscal impact.

RECOMMENDATION:

City staff recommends the Intergovernmental Relations Committee approve a proposed resolution opposing the inclusion of a citizenship question on the 2020 Census, and for this item to be considered by full City Council.