

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 6/27/2019

CONTACT: Manny Gonzales, Latino Policy Forum
303-880-5954, mgonzales@latinopolicyforum.org

The Latino Policy Forum applauds Supreme Court’s rejection of the citizenship question, keeping partisanship away from the 2020 Census

Illinois still needs to avoid an undercount -- just 1% would cost the state +\$120 million annually

CHICAGO – Today, in a 5-4 ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the untested citizenship question would not be allowed to go onto the 2020 Census, a major victory for Latino communities in Illinois that were facing the potential for a severe undercount if individuals were expected to designate their residency status.

The addition of the citizenship question would have disproportionately discouraged census participation from immigrant communities and communities of color out of fear that the data collected could be used to target and deport family members. Lower response rates from these communities, because of a citizenship question, would have increased the likelihood of a severe undercount in Illinois, costing the state millions of dollars and causing communities of color to lose electoral power and representation in state and congressional office.

Despite the barring of the citizenship question from the census, Illinois is still at risk of an undercount in 2020.

“This is a major victory for now, but it’s far from the only issue our hard-to-count communities face ahead of the 2020 Census,” said Sylvia Puente, Executive Director of the Latino Policy Forum. “As you can imagine, Latino leaders were concerned that a Supreme Court decision to include a citizenship question would have resulted in a much more severe undercount and play into the hands of people who want to not only to see minority communities receive less federal funding, but also usurp our power in Congress.

“This victory still doesn’t allay the challenges of ensuring a full count, because there is still a pervasive fear in the immigrant communities because of the current political climate, not to mention the electronic divide that exists and stands as a barrier for many minorities in filling out their census forms online,” Puente added. “So as you can see, we still face an uphill battle.”

How an undercount could impact for Illinois:

Without a full and accurate Census count, hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding is in jeopardy – funding that supports for key state programs such as Medicaid, Head Start, and infrastructure funds to fix Illinois' highways and bridges.

Illinois stands to lose more than \$1.2 billion in federal funding over the next decade and at least one additional congressional seat if we don't have an accurate count.

“Among the many reasons why the Latino Policy Forum is taking a leadership role in partnering with our nonprofit network and other allies to provide crucial information about the census is because early childhood education and equity are pillars of the organization's mission and 20 percent of Illinois children under the age of 5 live in hard-to-count communities. Counting them is critical,” Puente added.

- A George Washington University study found that if Illinois misses even one percent of its residents in the 2020 Census count, the state will lose at least \$120 million annually in federal grants.
- The Chicago Urban League estimates even higher financial losses for Illinois, stating in their report that a one percent undercount would amount to a \$1.2 billion cut (over the next decade) for Medicaid funding alone.
- Any significant loss in funding from the federal government would make Illinois' financial status even more fragile than it currently is and would likely cause additional budget and pension crises in Springfield as state lawmakers would be forced to try and make up for the lost federal dollars.

Exacerbation of gerrymandering and unrepresentative government

- The citizenship question would have negatively impacted immigrant communities and other communities of color throughout the state. Because legislative and congressional districts require equal population across each district, communities that are undercounted on paper inevitably will be packed into a fewer number of districts than they should be in reality.
- Illinois has lost one congressional seat after every census since 1950. This trend is almost certain to continue after the 2020 Census because of considerable population loss over the course of the last nine years. An undercount would cost our state a second congressional seat, shrinking Illinois' congressional delegation from its current 18 seats to 16 in 2021.

What the state is doing to prepare for the 2020 Census:

The state budget recently signed by Gov. J.B. Pritzker contains a \$29 million appropriation for census outreach. The appropriation, housed in the Illinois Department of Human Services, would establish a grant-making process for community organizations and local units of government to apply to engage Illinois' hard-to-count communities and educate them about the importance of the census.

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