



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John L. Sampson

Census 2010: Why It Is Important That You Participate Fully

JOHN L. SAMPSON February 4, 2010

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Stand Up And Be Counted

By State Senator John L. Sampson, Democratic Majority Conference Leader

New York State Senate

In a little over a month the 2010 Census will swing into action. The goal is simple: to get as accurate a count as possible of all people living in the United States. This time the US Census Department has gone to great lengths to make the reporting form as simple as possible, non-invasive, and far shorter than in previous years. The census form contains only 10 relatively simple questions.

It is vitally important that all of us in New York State participate fully in the upcoming census because non-participation can and will affect, not only New York state as a whole, but local communities as well. At stake is 400 billion federal dollars. The more complete and accurate the count the more money we will receive. The lower and less accurate the count, the less money we will get – it is as simple as that.

Participating in the census is not just some meaningless exercise that the federal government does every 10 years. This 2010 count will quite literally determine and affect the quality of all our lives. For example, information and data collected by the census will determine how many seats a state gets in the United States Congress. Census data will also influence the building of hospitals, schools, senior centers, bridges, tunnels and other public works projects, job training centers and emergency services. More of these things come from one simple process: answer 10 questions and return the form to the US Census Department.

Plain and simple non-participation at the family level will cost our community money. For example, for each person in a family who did not participate the loss to the community is estimated at just over \$9,000 per individual. Clearly, this figure can reach millions of dollars lost because people did not bother to fill out and return the census forms or did not speak to census takers when they knock on your door. This multiplier effect on our community will be financially devastating.

I know that there is a fear especially among the undocumented immigrant community that data obtained from the census will be shared with the United States immigration authorities and that deportation can result. Let me be clear: in my discussion with the US Census Department I was given the assurance, backed up by law, that no data will be shared with any federal agency and certainly not the United States Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS). So the undocumented can participate fully without fear of their status being shared with the USCIS. Moreover the questions asked have nothing to do with immigration or immigration status.

As a matter of fact, non-citizens visiting their families for more than six months also have to be counted in the census and this adds to our numbers. The census ensures that each community gets the right number of representatives in government. Because representation is based on population, an up-to-date tally is essential. Equitably distributing the billions of

dollars of public money requires up-to-date population data.

In broad terms, the census helps us see how our country is changing. In the 2000 census, 281.4 million people were counted in the United States, an increase of 13.2 percent from the 1990 census population of 248.7 million. The highest rates of population growth were reported in the South and West.

Could census data fall into the wrong hands? The data from the census and all Census Bureau surveys, including the American Community Survey, are protected by law. Personal information like names and addresses can never be released. Statistical summaries of the data for geographic areas and political units are available on the Web, but there is no way that individual households could be identified based on their responses.

Finally, in the 1990 census New York City lost more than \$415 million in just federal funds alone because of a significant under count. I am urging New Yorkers to participate fully in the upcoming census. In these difficult economic times we can't afford to lose this kind of money again.

[Senator John L. Sampson represents Brooklyn's 19th Senate District that includes Flatlands, Canarsie, parts of Brownsville and East new York.]