

***“Woe to those who make unjust laws,
to those who issue oppressive decrees,
to deprive the poor of their rights
and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people...”*** Isaiah 10:1

The United States 2020 Census is a Moral Document

A Statement of Faith by the National Religious Leadership Roundtable

April 1, 2019

In 2020 the United States will undertake its once-every-10 year counting of all the people residing in this country – the Census.

More than just a statistical tool, the decennial Census is also a moral document because of the significant impact it has on the lives and well-being of all residents, particularly those who are the most vulnerable and living on the margins of society.

As members of the National Religious Leadership Roundtable, we want to make sure that the ethical implications of the 2020 Census are understood by government decision makers – executive, legislative and judicial - and that we all strive to make sure it is a fair and just counting all who live in this country.

As a collaboration of progressive faith and spiritual leaders across a wide spectrum of religious settings, creeds and disciplines, the National Religious Leadership Roundtable raises its multi-faith voice to express alarm about the potential harm that is posed by the threat of an undercounting of United States residents in the 2020 Census.

Our concern is that the decision to include a question around the citizenship status of everyone being counted—a decision now temporarily halted through injunction – will have a crippling effect on the accuracy of the Census as people refrain from answering that question for fear that they or others in their households may be harmed if their status as citizens is called into question.

Even the Census Bureau acknowledged in memos and communications that came to light in the litigation process that the citizenship question was likely to harm the accuracy of the Census.

Since federal funding for needed government services are based on Census data, inaccurate counts affect not just those who avoid answering but also their neighbors, friends and associates as well as organizations that exist to assist them.

This negative impact will fall most heavily on the those who are living on the margins of our society and depend on government funded programs of support for their daily existence – those who are poor, sick, disabled, women and children, the elderly, LGBTQ people, immigrants – the very people we see on a daily basis in our churches, synagogues, mosques, assemblies and other faith settings.

We are talking about essential support programs such as Medicaid, SNAP (food stamps), public housing benefits, special education grants, Head Start, WIC, energy assistance, disaster preparedness and a myriad of other government services.

Thus, already underserved and marginalized communities may be further isolated and cut-off from needed support by undercounting.

In today's America more than 40 percent of the population live in poverty and a quarter of a million people die from poverty each year. As righteous people, we should be doing all that we can to correct rather than exacerbate these troubling, immoral statistics.

As the United States Supreme Court prepares in April 2019 to hear oral arguments as to why the citizenship question should not be enjoined, we call on all people of good intent to make their voices heard in opposition to allowing this citizenship question to cloud rather than clarify the real intent of the Census – how many people reside in this country.

We urge faith communities and settings to raise a holy clamor to restore righteousness.

“Keep the Citizenship Question off the 2020 Census form.”

Bishop Allyson Nelson Abrams, D.Min, Empowerment Liberation Cathedral

Robyn Henderson-Espinoza, PhD Founder, Activist Theology Project

Francis DeBernardo, Executive Director, New Ways Ministry

United Church of Christ

Marianne Duddy-Burke, Executive Director, DignityUSA

Metropolitan Community Churches

Many Voices: A Black Church Movement for Gay & Transgender Justice

Marilyn Paarlberg, Executive Director, Room for All (Reformed Church in America)

Rev. Marie Alford-Harkey, Religious Institute

Rev. Marian Edmonds-Allen, Executive Director, PARITY

Center Faith, Interfaith LGBTQ Resources, Washington, DC

Rev. Alba Onofrio, Soulforce

Global Justice Institute

Rev. Louis Mitchell, Transfaith

TransSaints - Eastern Region

Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D., Co-Director, Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER)

Rev. Naomi Washington Leaphart, Faith Work Director, The National LGBTQ Task Force

The National Religious Leadership Roundtable (NRLR) is an interfaith network of leaders of LGBTQ-affirming religious, spiritual and justice-seeking organizations. The NRLR was founded in 1998 by the National LGBTQ Task Force.