



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**The Secretary of Commerce**  
Washington, D.C. 20230

July 5, 2018

Ms. Catherine E. Lhamon  
Chair  
United States Commission on Civil Rights  
1331 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Room 1150  
Washington, DC 20425

Dear Ms. Lhamon:

Thank you for your letter regarding the U.S. Department of Commerce's decision to reinstate a citizenship question to the 2020 decennial census. I appreciate your taking the time to share your views on this important matter.

At my direction, the Department and the U.S. Census Bureau conducted a thorough review of the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) December 2017 request to reinstate a citizenship question on the 2020 Census. That review included legal, program, and policy considerations. On March 26, 2018, after taking a hard look at the request and ensuring that I considered all facts and data relevant to the question so I could make an informed decision on how to respond, I determined that reinstatement of a citizenship question on the 2020 Census is necessary to provide complete and accurate data in response to the DOJ's request. A copy of my memorandum directing the Census Bureau to reinstate the citizenship question is available on the Department's website: [https://www.commerce.gov/sites/commerce.gov/files/2018-03-26\\_2.pdf](https://www.commerce.gov/sites/commerce.gov/files/2018-03-26_2.pdf).

I would also like to respond to some of the more troubling reactions to my decision, particularly those that encourage non-participation in the 2020 Census on the ground that Census responses could be shared with law enforcement and used against respondents. No one should be afraid to stand up and be counted. The law is clear – the answers a person provides on a Census form may not be used for law enforcement or any other purpose that would reveal his or her identity or how an individual responded to a question. Anyone who handles Census data swears an oath to keep those data confidential for life. Under Title 13, using Census responses for any other reason than to produce population statistics is punishable by fines and up to five years in prison.

I am asking Federal, state, and local leaders to reassure the public of these facts. Such public encouragement and reassurance would help achieve the goals that we share and are working very hard to achieve: a complete and accurate Census. By encouraging non-citizens, their friends, and their families to respond to the Census, you can help the Census Bureau conduct a complete and accurate count. This in turn would provide the anonymous enumeration of ALL persons. Better citizenship data will allow stronger enforcement of the Voting Rights

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Act to protect minorities, and accurate numbers will help governments and civic organizations provide better services to all.

People should know the facts – their information is protected by law, and it is their civic duty, and in their own best interest, to stand up and be counted. I look forward to working with you to ensure a complete and accurate 2020 Census.

If you have any additional questions or would like to discuss this matter further, please contact Michael Walsh, Deputy General Counsel, at (202) 482-4772.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wilbur Ross". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "W".

Wilbur Ross