



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
DISTRICT 5
File #: 20-102

Board Meeting Date: 3/10/2020

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors
From: David J. Canepa, Supervisor, District 5
Subject: Request to Provide Census 2020 Paper Questionnaires in Multiple Languages

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a resolution urging the United States Census Bureau to provide Census 2020 paper questionnaires for language groups besides English and Spanish that are spoken by 100,000 or more United States residents, including Chinese, Tagalog and Russian.

BACKGROUND:

The decennial Census is one of the cornerstones of America's democracy, and a full and complete count is crucial to ensuring accurate political representation and an equitable distribution of federal and other resources. The U.S. Census Bureau chose not to provide non-English questionnaires for Census 2020, with the exception of Spanish. The elimination of non-English printed questionnaires will result in a disproportionate and adverse impact in both California and the County of San Mateo. It is notable that this elimination of non-English questionnaires is a departure from past practice, as the U.S. Census Bureau provided paper copies of the Census 2010 questionnaire in English and, by request, in Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and Russian.

DISCUSSION:

According to The New School Digital Equity Laboratory, 35% of adults in the United States still do not have access to the internet at home. This includes 53% of Latinx adults; 43% of Black adults; 42% of rural residents; more than 50% of those over the age of 65; and over half of those earning less than median income, all of whom lack access to the internet at home. In San Mateo County, 12% of residents do not have broadband subscriptions.

Notwithstanding the lack of home internet access in many communities, the Census Bureau has decided to mail paper 2020 Census questionnaires printed only in English and Spanish, opting to collect data and provide language support in 11 other languages online and by phone. There is great concern at the state and local government level, and also among community organizations, that many residents who speak languages besides English and Spanish will fall through the cracks. The

Census Bureau's decision could have a significant negative impact, for example, on the ability to count many members in the Chinese, Tagalog and Russian speaking communities here in San Mateo County.

In the County of San Mateo, 46% of our 721,160 residents over the age of 5 speak a language other than English at home.

According to the 2018 American Community Survey estimate data profiles, the basic language breakdown in San Mateo County is as follows:

Basic Language Breakdown in San Mateo County	Number of people
Total number of people, 5 years or older	721,160
People who speak only English at home	387,341
People speaking a language other than English at home	333,819
People who speak English less than "very well"	126,578

Primary Languages spoken at home in San Mateo County, by resident:

English	369,102
Spanish	138,645
Chinese	51,809
Tagalog	44,757
Russian	7,063

Language access continues to pose a significant barrier for Limited English Proficient communities to participate in the upcoming decennial census. The lack of bilingual paper forms jeopardizes equitable access to the Census and compounds existing risks of an undercount due to the digital divide and mistrust and fear of the federal government. A complete and accurate count in Census 2020 is essential in order to determine federal appropriations to public benefits in order to assist marginalized communities, in addition to ensuring appropriate and accurate proportional representation.

Given the foregoing, it is appropriate for this Board of Supervisors to urge the United States Census Bureau to provide non-English paper questionnaires for language groups of 100,000 or more in the United States during the 2020 Census including Chinese, Tagalog and Russian.

FISCAL IMPACT:

No fiscal impact.