



League of United Latin American Citizens

Testimony

by

**Rosa Rosales, National President
The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)**

before

**The United States House of Representatives
Committee on Oversight & Government Reform
Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives**

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Chairman Clay, Representative Turner, and members of the Subcommittee, I am Rosa Rosales, National President for the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). I am honored to appear before you today to testify on behalf of LULAC members nationwide to discuss the Census Bureau's efforts to prepare for the 2010 Decennial Census and achieve a diverse workforce.

(LULAC) is the oldest and largest membership-based Hispanic civil rights organization in the United States. LULAC advances the economic condition, educational attainment, political influence, health and civil rights of Hispanic Americans through community-based programs operating at more than 700 councils nationwide, concentrated in 32 states. In its 78 years of history, LULAC has worked to bring about many of the positive social and economic changes that Hispanic Americans have witnessed.

Throughout history, LULAC has fought for voting rights and full access to the political process, and equal educational opportunity for Hispanic children. It has been a long and often difficult struggle, but LULAC's proud record of activism continues to this day, as LULAC councils across the nation hold voter registration drives and citizenship awareness sessions, sponsor health fairs and tutorial programs, and raise money for the LULAC National Scholarship Fund.

LULAC was also actively involved in Latino community outreach for the 1990 and 2000 Census, and has participated in Census policy development and public education. Since 2000, LULAC members and leadership have continuously participated in voter registration drives across the country, especially within states with growing Latino populations.

Throughout its existence, LULAC has forged together exceptional nationwide partnerships within the Latino grassroots community, and with local, state, and national political leadership. Specifically, our lasting relationships with key government agencies, such as the Census Bureau, have familiarized us with the types of social, political, and economic difficulties that arise in data collection and undercounting segments of the Latino community.

Mr. Chairman, I have been asked to speak to you today regarding the Census Bureau's plans to diversify their partnerships and workforce, and provide recommendations as to how they could improve their efforts.

To begin, the 2010 Census must produce the most accurate count possible for Latinos and other underserved communities. As you are aware, the Census not

only serves to apportion congressional seats, the information also establishes billions of dollars in federal funds that set the level of services that are available locally and statewide.

The 2000 Census counted 35.3 million Latinos in the United States, an increase of 13 million from 1990. Since the release of the last Census, the Latino population has surged, becoming the largest minority group at 44.3 million people. Our community also remains the fastest growing segment of the American populace. By 2050, the Latino population is expected to top 102.6 million people, constituting a quarter of our nation's population.

Now, more than ever, the Census Bureau must develop an accurate and effective method of counting to ensure that our nation's largest minority group is properly represented in government, that our voting rights are secured, and that our community receives an appropriate allocation of government funding for schools, hospitals, housing, veterans benefits, and other urban and regional planning programs. For that purpose, LULAC proposes that the following concrete steps must be taken:

I. The Bureau must fully engage communities that are hard to reach, such as immigrant and non-English-speaking populations.

I fear that the anti-immigrant rhetoric, large scale raids, and local targeted legislation that have taken place in the last year have created additional challenges that the Bureau must take into account. Unfortunately, tens of thousands of immigrant families have been broken apart, and millions more continue living every day as if it might be their last day in the United States. Local immigration ordinances have denied a wide range of government services, including medical care; the right to schooling; and, even closer to home, in Prince William County, access to libraries. Restrictions such as these inevitably lead to more discrimination against Latino citizens and undocumented populations, and exacerbate a climate of fear and mistrust of all government agencies. The Census Bureau must respond by doubling its efforts to reach out to the most vulnerable members of our community.

II. In order for the Census Bureau to regain the trust of the Latino immigrant community and attain an accurate count, it must develop effective written messaging and public service announcements in Spanish that raise awareness of the Census and its importance, and guarantees confidentiality and privacy mandates throughout the process.

If the community is alerted that they are protected by federal statutes, then it will be far more likely to fully participate in the Census count. This message must be spread through radio and television programming, and must also create easy to read materials for appropriate undercounted populations and languages. Community-based organizations such as LULAC can provide extra assistance to the development of culturally sensitive tools and written materials.

III. The Bureau must also negotiate with the Secretary of Homeland Security and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to halt its enforcement raids throughout the Census process.

The raids will dramatically undermine the counting process. ICE's predecessor, INS, committed itself during the last two Censuses to adapt their enforcement in an appropriate manner. LULAC calls on ICE to do the same for the 2010 Census.

IV. Part of the Bureau's efforts to partner with community based organizations must consist of strategies to eliminate the undercounting of minority communities.

The Census Bureau has estimated that it undercounted at least 3 million Latinos in the 2000 Census. While we commend the Census Bureau for improving its performance based on the 1990 undercount of 4.9%, the undercount still varies dramatically and in troubling ways between geographic areas-- particularly in areas of predominantly minority neighborhoods. Such was the case in the city of Los Angeles, California as investigated by Paul Ong and Doug Houston at the Ralph & Goly Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies at UCLA.¹

In their 2000 analysis of the Los Angeles County Census, the undercount rate of each neighborhood varied depending on socioeconomic characteristics and demographic composition. Within the county, the neighborhoods with the highest undercounted rates generally tended to be poorer, less educated, less proficient in English, and primarily inhabited by people of color. In cases where neighborhoods were undercounted by more than 1% but less than 2.5%, 44% of the community tended to be Latino, 10.5% African-American, and 13.9% Asian/Pacific Islander. Even more disconcerting is the finding that in neighborhoods that were undercounted between 2.5% and 3%, Latinos and African-Americans constituted the largest majority by far, at 68.2% and 14%, respectively.

¹ Paul Ong and Doug Houston. The 2000 Census Undercount in Los Angeles County. The Ralph & Goly Lewis Center of Regional Policy Studies at UCLA. Los Angeles, CA: December 2002. <http://lewis.spa.ucla.edu/publications/workingpapers/LACensusUndercount.pdf>

Latinos and African Americans are disproportionately at risk of living in the most vulnerable and undercounted neighborhoods-- and consequently, in areas that receive fewer public resources than they require.

In order to ensure an accurate account of our most under-served communities, the Census Bureau has already begun to implement new, innovative programs that could potentially eliminate the adverse effects of the differential undercounting that is found in Los Angeles minority communities.

Bureau field activities are underway to address this issue, specifically through the Census Partnership Program that addresses some of our nation's diverse neighborhoods. LULAC applauds the Partnership and LUCA Programs as they both try to develop effective outreach and affiliation with community-based organizations and local/tribal communities.

V. It is imperative that the Census build on existing partnerships with major community organizations, to increase diversity within the Census Bureau. Recruitment must not solely be done at conventions and other large-scale events, but must also be done organically within the designated undercounted communities.

I would be remiss without recognizing the Census Bureau's participation in the 2007 LULAC National Convention held in Chicago, IL, July 9-14th. Bureau representatives were on hand at the event to recruit LULAC members and other Latinos to join the Census Bureau staff. This was an opportunity for the Bureau to identify not only potential community partners, but also potential employees with language skills and cultural familiarity that could help increase the accuracy of the next Census. Though large scale venues continue to provide a strong opportunity for the Bureau to reach its goals and initiate new and lasting relationships with the Latino community, additional methods should also be explored.

Part of the success of the 2000 Census was the Bureau's ability to target new partner organizations. While LULAC worked successfully with other national and local organizations during the 2000 Census, we were most effective when we specifically identified leaders from the marginalized communities that we were trying to reach out to, specifically with civil rights grassroots advocates and religious leaders. These community leaders helped us reach out to even more people that otherwise may not have trusted the Census Bureau staff.

For many Latino neighborhoods, Spanish is the primary language that is used, and many of the individuals that the Census will be trying to reach out to are also non-citizens. In Southern states with large growing Latino populations like North

Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee, it is critical that the Census Bureau hire full-time bilingual staff with experience working within the Latino immigrant community. The Bureau must make a long-term systemic effort to hire enumerators that are familiar with the local community in which they will be working.

VI. Finally, in order to increase cultural competency and mitigate marginalized communities' mistrust of federal government employees, the Bureau must seek out indigenous community leaders for full-time positions at both the local Census offices and regional offices.

Unfortunately, Latino representation in the federal workplace continues to woefully lag behind other groups. The OPM's FY 2005 FEORP report documents that Latino employment at the federal workforce was only 7.4%, compared to the Latino civilian labor force total of 13.5%. If the Bureau is to improve its enumeration efforts within marginalized communities,-- and specifically, within the Latino migrant and undocumented populations-- it will rest on a successful effort to increase the representation of Latinos within their local and regional offices.

The under-representation of Latinos impacts the development and implementation of Latino community programs and policies everywhere. The lack of participation inhibits the efficiency of these government programs and tools from top to bottom, which subsequently leads to mistrust and miscommunication within large segments of the Latino population. With a fully representative staff of Latino managers, supervisors, and enumerators, working in both Washington, D.C. and the local community, the level of apathy, underparticipation, and undercounting will decrease.

The League of United Latin American Citizens remains fully committed to working with the Census Bureau, as well as this Subcommittee, to ensure that all Latinos are counted in the 2010 Census. In closing, I would like to thank the LULAC National Staff for their assistance in preparing this testimony-- particularly our Legislative Director, Javier Dominguez, to whom you may direct any further inquiries on this matter.

I would like to thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and this Subcommittee once more for allowing me to participate, and for your consideration of our recommendations.