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Mr. Arturo Vargas

† deceased

Testimony

by

**Arturo Vargas, Executive Director
National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed
Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund**

before

**the United States House of Representatives Oversight and
Government Reform Committee
Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census
and National Archives
on 2010 Census responsiveness to the Latino Community**

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WWW.NALEO.ORG

12/06 1122 W. Washington Blvd., 3rd Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90015
(213) 747-7606
Fax (213) 747-7664

600 Pennsylvania Avenue,
Washington, DC 20003
(202) 546-2536
Fax (202) 546-4121

1314 Texas Ave., Suite 1630
Houston, TX 77002
(713) 228-6400
Fax (713) 228-0606

110 Wall Street, 16th Floor
New York, NY 10005
(212) 480-1918
Fax (212) 480-1697
Fax (646) 227-0897

Chairman Clay, Ranking member Representative Turner and members of the Subcommittee:
I am Arturo Vargas, Executive Director of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund. Thank you for the invitation to appear before you today on behalf of the NALEO Educational Fund to discuss how to best ensure that the 2010 Census will be responsive to the Latino community.

The NALEO Educational Fund is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that facilitates full Latino participation in the American political process, from citizenship to public service. Our constituency includes the more than 6,000 Latino elected and appointed officials nationwide.

We are the leading Latino organization in the area of Census policy development and public education, and we are deeply committed to ensuring that the Census Bureau provides our nation with the most accurate count of its population.

The NALEO Educational Fund was actively involved in outreach to the Latino community for the decennial enumerations in 1990 and 2000. Since 2000, we have served on the Secretary of Commerce's 2010 Census Advisory Committee, or its predecessor, the Decennial Census Advisory Committee, and we have participated in the Committee's discussions surrounding the planning for the 2010 enumeration. In addition, through our strong relationship with our Latino leadership constituency, we have become very familiar with the types of Census data that public officials need to govern effectively, and some of the challenges they face in obtaining access to relevant data for their policy decisions.

Mr. Chairman, we need the 2010 Census to produce the most accurate count of our nation's population as possible. Census data are the fundamental building blocks for reapportionment and redistricting, which determine the contours of our representative democracy. Policymakers and planners at all levels of government rely on these data to make important decisions about their services, such as the number of teachers that will be needed in their classrooms, the best places to build new roads, or the best way to provide job training. The accuracy of Census data is also critical for the effective allocation of government funding for schools, hospitals and other vital social programs. These decisions affect the lives of all Americans.

To secure an accurate count of our nation's population, an accurate count of the 44.3 million Latinos who are now the nation's second-largest and fastest-growing population group is imperative. An undercount of such a large segment of the U.S. population means a failed Census. An accurate count of the Latino community is necessary if we are to make sound policies for the economic, social and political well-being of the entire country.

Through our broad range of Census activities, we have gained a deep understanding of what must be done to ensure that Latinos are fully counted in the 2010 Census. We offer the following recommendations:

I. The Census Bureau must develop effective outreach and education partnerships with community-based organizations that the Latino community trusts, building on the successes and experiences of Census 2000. In 2000, the Census Bureau worked together with national and local partners throughout the nation to encourage Latinos to answer the Census. Our organization, together with schools, local faith institutions and other community groups, were particularly effective in reaching "hard-to-count" populations, such as immigrants and non-English speaking populations, who lack basic information about the Census or are fearful about the consequences of completing the Census questionnaire. We are particularly proud of the mail back response rates in several Latino-majority communities which were both a tribute to the effectiveness of the partnerships and a demonstration of the sincere desire among millions of Latinos to make themselves count in 2000.

We believe it is particularly important to build upon the successes in 2000, and begin implementation of the partnership program in Fiscal Year (FY) 2008. Both the Bureau and its partners need sufficient time to lay the foundation for their work and effectively plan their activities. The Bureau must start to identify these partners, develop or strengthen relationships with them, and provide the tools that will be needed for outreach work. The partners need time to develop their organizational capacity and infrastructure, and to obtain the resources from

philanthropic groups or other sources required to support their activities.

We are deeply concerned that the Administration did not include funding for Census partnership activities in its FY 2008 budget request, thus delaying the implementation of partnership planning to FY 2009 at the earliest. This simply would be too late, and would force the Bureau and its partners to work frantically in FY 2009 to develop and launch effective outreach programs.

We congratulate and appreciate the actions by the Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies (CJS) Subcommittee of the U.S. House Appropriations Committee to provide an additional \$13 million in the FY 2008 budget for the Bureau of the Census to support partnership and outreach efforts in preparation for the 2010 Decennial Census. As the Committee and the Census Bureau have acknowledged, such promotional efforts increase mail-back response rates and lower enumeration costs.

II. The Census Bureau must implement a communications and outreach plan that uses culturally-appropriate outreach materials and takes into account the special challenges in reaching certain Latino sub-groups. As the Census Bureau develops its communications plan for 2010, it must utilize the “best practices” for reaching Latino residents and ensuring that they respond to the enumeration efforts. The Latino community is comprised of many diverse national origin and subgroups, with residents whose origins include Mexico, Central and South America, and parts of the Caribbean. The Bureau must develop outreach materials and strategies that are culturally and linguistically appropriate for these groups. The Bureau’s community-based partners can provide invaluable assistance for the agency’s efforts in this regard. It is also critical that the Bureau consult and work with Spanish-language media as it implements its communications plan. Spanish-language media are a trusted source of information for many of the nation’s Latino residents, and these media outlets have extensive expertise on reaching different Latino population groups.

The NALEO Educational Fund is pleased that the RFP for the Communications Contract

included requirements for the Contractor to: utilize partners as part of the overall communications strategy; have, or subcontract with firms that have, expertise and experience in marketing to historically undercounted populations, including Hispanics, African Americans, Asians, American Indians and Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders; and create materials in-language for appropriate advertising and communications materials, as well as review all non-English materials. The NALEO Educational Fund believes that the small business contract requirements should include a specific category requirement for minority-owned businesses, which it currently does not.

In addition, the Bureau's communications and outreach plans must take into account the special strategies needed to reach rural residents. Many of these residents are migrant or seasonal farmworkers, with limited-English proficiency, who live in temporary or non-traditional housing. The Bureau's outreach plans for these residents must complement the special strategies it must employ to identify rural populations with special needs, and to implement enhanced enumeration efforts within these areas.

III. Special strategies and preparations will be required to enumerate the nation's immigrant population, regardless of their status. Our nation's current debate about the future of its immigration policy is creating additional challenges that the Bureau must address in reaching the newcomer population. Some policymakers have adopted a divisive tone and tenor during this discussion, and several states and localities have implemented or are considering measures intended to target immigrants. Some of these measures require local law enforcement agencies to enforce federal immigration laws; others would require apartment owners to check the immigration status of potential renters. This has created a climate which will exacerbate immigrants' distrust of contact with government agencies, including the Census Bureau. Undocumented immigrants, legal permanent residents, and even U.S. citizens who live in households where family members have varying status of immigration, will be discouraged from answering the Census. The anti-immigrant climate today will harm confidence in the confidentiality of the Census, and promote the belief that among many residents the Bureau will use the information they provide in a detrimental manner. It is critical that the Bureau develop

messages and strategies that effectively communicate the confidentiality of information provided by Census respondents. The Bureau itself must ensure that it reinforces public trust in this confidentiality by strictly adhering to its own privacy principles and mandates, including Title 13 – the Protection of Confidential Information; the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act, and the Privacy Act of 1974, on released of data on “sensitive populations” to law enforcement agencies.

I concur with my colleague Karen Narasaki, President of the Asian American Justice Center who testified before this Committee on April 24th that the Census Bureau must begin working with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to limit its enforcement activity during the Census process. We know that while ICE’s predecessor, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, committed to limit activity during the 2000 Census, previous enforcement activity may have caused many immigrants to avoid participating in the 2000 Census count.

IV. The Census Bureau must ensure that its Census 2010 workforce reflects the diversity of the nation’s population. In order to accurately reach and count our nation’s Latino residents in 2010, the Census Bureau must employ a diverse workforce, from its highest managerial positions to its field enumerators. The Bureau has now started to open temporary regional offices, and it is critical that it hires a diverse group of Office Directors to lead its regional operations.

With respect to local enumerators, the Bureau must hire individuals who are familiar with their local communities and their residents. For many Latino neighborhoods, these workers must be bilingual in English and Spanish. It is also likely that some individuals who possess the best skills to work as enumerators in the Latino community may not be U.S. citizens. We urge the Bureau to implement a waiver in its hiring practices that would allow work-authorized non-citizens to take on enumerator positions. This is particularly important for regions of the

country where there emerging Latino populations are comprised of large numbers of non-citizens and non-English speaking populations, such as the South.

In order to ensure the diverse workforce needed for the 2010 Census enumeration, the Bureau

must also strengthen its existing efforts to implement a well-designed and effective recruitment, retention and promotion plan to increase the number of Latinos at the Census Bureau.

V. The Census Bureau must be able to quickly adjust its plans based on the outcomes of the 2008 Dress Rehearsal. 2008 is an particularly important year in the Decennial Census cycle, highlighted by the Census Dress Rehearsal in San Joaquin County, California, and several North Carolina counties. The dress rehearsal will feature new methods such as bilingual questionnaires and a targeted replacement mailing, new technologies including hand-held computers and Global Positioning System software, updated address lists and digital maps, and new strategies for reaching hard-to-count populations. The dress rehearsal provides the only opportunity to test the integrated 2010 plan in a Census-like environment. The Bureau must be ready to make final adjustments to the 2010 plans given the outcomes of next-year's Dress Rehearsal.

The NALEO Educational Fund remains committed to being an active and thoughtful partner to this Subcommittee, Congress, the White House and the Census Bureau, in ensuring the success of the 2010 Census, so that our nation can rely on the most accurate data possible. I thank the Chairman, the Ranking Member, and the Subcommittee once again for providing us with the opportunity to share our views today on the responsiveness of the 2010 Census to the Latino community.