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**Testimony**

by

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

before

**the United States Senate Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs Committee  
Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management,  
Government Information, Federal Services, and International  
Security  
on Reducing the Undercount in the 2010 Census**

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Chairman Carper, Ranking member Senator Coburn 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 reduce the undercount in the 2010 Census.

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. In 2007, we launched the “*ya es hora*” campaign (“It’s time”), a comprehensive, multi-year effort to integrate Latinos into American civic life. Our Spanish-language media partners for the campaign include Univision, Entravision, and ImpreMedia, and our national partners are the National Council of La Raza, the Service Employees International Union on citizenship promotion and Mi Familia Vota Educational Fund on voter engagement. The first two phases of this effort involved mobilizing eligible Latino legal permanent residents to apply for U.S. citizenship, and then mobilizing Latino U.S. citizens to vote. In our next phase, after the November election, we will educate all Latinos living in the United States about the importance of being counted in the 2010 Census and promote participation in the enumeration process.

In addition, 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. Through our strong relationship with our Latino leadership constituency, we have also 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 of our representative democracy; Census data are the basis for reapportionment and redistricting. Policymakers at all levels of government also rely on Census data to make important decisions that affect the lives of all Americans. These data help make such determinations as the number of teachers that are needed in classrooms, the best places to build roads and highways, and the best way to provide health and public safety services to our neighborhoods and communities. The accuracy of Census data is also critical for the effective allocation of government funding for schools, hospitals and other vital social programs.

To secure an accurate count of our nation's population, an accurate count of the 45.5 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. Congress must provide the Census Bureau with sufficient funding to prepare effectively for the 2010 enumeration. Census Day 2010 is less than two years away. The groundwork done in the final year before Census 2010 will, to a large extent, determine its success. To ensure a full count of our population, the Census Bureau must undertake several complex tasks well in advance of the enumeration. It needs a full year to print and address 130 million Census forms. It must open and staff hundreds of local Census offices across the nation. It must recruit and hire the several thousands of workers needed during the peak field operations. Next spring, workers

must canvass every block and road in the country to verify addresses. Any delay in preparations for these activities – even for a few weeks – will impair the Bureau’s ability to conduct its Census operations effectively.

In addition, the Bureau faces a particularly daunting challenge with respect to its April 2007 decision to abandon plans to use wireless handheld devices (“HHC’s”) to collect information from individuals who do not return their Census questionnaires in the mail. The Bureau had initially hoped that their field workers could use these devices to relay information to headquarters obtained during follow-up visits with non-respondents. However, because of technological problems, the Bureau will not be using HHC’s for this phase of the enumeration, and will revert back to “pen and paper” methods for its non-respondent follow-up. Thus, the Bureau must now undertake intensive preparations to switch back to this traditional system.

Reverting back to a paper-based system for non-respondent follow-up has important implications for the resources needed by the Bureau and its ability to achieve a full count of the Latino population. For example, the Bureau will need to print additional forms and maps for use in the follow-up operations. It will need to expand its storage facilities. The agency must also hire more enumerators than originally planned, and it will incur greater costs for the overall control system for the follow-up operations. The Bureau will have to intensify its efforts to find enumerators that can reach Latinos effectively – these workers must be familiar with their local communities, and for many Latino neighborhoods, they must be bilingual in English and Spanish.

To ensure that the Bureau can carry out its 2010 Census preparations in a thorough and timely manner, we urge Congress to fund the Administration’s revised Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 request of approximately \$3.2 billion. We are particularly concerned that if the Bureau does not receive the full amount of this funding, it will shortchange programs that it may consider less “essential” for the enumeration. For example, we believe it is critical that the Bureau develops outreach and education partnerships with community-based organizations that the Latino community trusts. 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.

In order to build upon the successes in 2000, the Bureau and its partners need to lay a strong foundation in 2009 for their joint efforts. The Bureau must identify these partners, develop or strengthen relationships with them, and provide the tools that will be needed for outreach work. The partners need to develop their organizational capacity and infrastructure, and to obtain the resources from philanthropic groups or other sources required to support their activities. Insufficient funding for the Bureau's Partnership Program will significantly weaken one of the most effective tools we have to help ensure the full participation of Latinos and other hard-to-count groups in the 2010 enumeration.

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 continues to develop and implement 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 in reaching different Latino population groups.

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.

In order to achieve a full count in the 2010 enumeration, the Bureau must ensure that the contractor and sub-contractors for its communication plan have the resources necessary to effectively reach all of the diverse segments of the Latino community. These firms need to be able to meet on a regular basis with Latino organizations; create a wide range of promotional materials in language appropriate for Latino audiences; and utilize print, broadcast and digital media in their efforts. In order to accomplish all of the foregoing, the Bureau must provide sufficient funding for communications efforts that target Latinos.

III. Special strategies and preparations will be required to enumerate the nation's immigrant population. Our nation's current debate about the future of its immigration policy has created 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 create hostile environments for 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 immigration statuses, will be discouraged from answering the Census. The anti-immigrant climate today will harm confidence in the

confidentiality of the Census, and will raise concerns among many residents that the Bureau will use the information they provide in a detrimental manner.

Thus, 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 the release of data on “sensitive populations” to law enforcement agencies.

In addition, the Bureau must work with agencies at all levels of government – federal, state and local – to promote public trust in the confidentiality of the Census. It is critical that the Bureau work with these agencies and educate them about the kinds of activities which will undermine public confidence and deter hard-to-count populations from participating in the 2010 enumeration.

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. First, the Bureau must strengthen its existing efforts to implement a well-designed and effective recruitment, retention and promotion plan to increase the overall number of Latinos at the Census Bureau. In addition, as the Bureau continues to open and staff its temporary regional offices, it must hire a diverse group of top managers to lead its regional operations.

As noted earlier, the Bureau must hire enumerators 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 the emerging Latino populations are comprised of large numbers of non-citizens and non-English speaking populations, such as the South.

V. The Census Bureau must be able to quickly adjust its plans based on the outcomes of the 2008 Dress Rehearsal. In 2008, the Bureau conducted its “Dress Rehearsal” in San Joaquin County, California, and several North Carolina counties, which provided the agency its only opportunity to test its integrated 2010 enumeration plan in a Census-like environment. The Dress Rehearsal featured new methods such as bilingual questionnaires and a targeted replacement mailing, new technologies, updated address lists and digital maps, and new strategies for reaching hard-to-count populations. The Bureau must now be ready to make final adjustments to the 2010 plans given the outcomes of the Dress Rehearsal.

For example, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) utilized observations made during the 2008 Dress Rehearsal, together with a review of Bureau and contractor data, to issue recommendations regarding the use of HHC’s for address canvassing. (Although the Bureau has abandoned its plans to use HHC’s for non-respondent follow-up, it still intends to provide these devices to workers to collect and transmit data when they are in the field verifying addresses). In a July 2008 report, the GAO raised several issues regarding the performance of the HHC’s, and the Bureau’s basis for determining when this new technology would be ready to meet the agency’s operational needs. The recommendations also addressed the need for specific benchmarks and approaches for monitoring and evaluating HHC performance during address canvassing. We urge the Bureau to implement these recommendations as it plans further testing for the utilization of the HHC’s, as well as any other “lessons learned” that emerge from its evaluation of the 2008 Dress Rehearsal.

Additionally, the Census Bureau did not include some components of its 2010 enumeration plan in the 2008 Dress Rehearsal. For example, according to GAO testimony before the House Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives delivered in June 2008, there was not a thorough testing of all aspects of the Bureau’s non-respondent follow-up



activities during the Dress Rehearsal. The GAO notes that these activities are the single largest field operation in the 2010 Census, and it suggests that the failure to test them under Census-like conditions raises uncertainties about their impact on 2010 operations. We believe that the Bureau must carefully examine all of the key components of its 2010 operations which were not included in the 2008 Dress Rehearsal, and implement effective tests for the components as expeditiously as possible.

VI. Congress must reject any proposals which would prevent the full enumeration of every U.S. resident in the Census. As 2010 approaches, there have been legislative and policy efforts to exclude the undocumented from the Census enumeration. These proposals are contrary to one of the fundamental precepts of our Constitution, which calls for a full count of every person residing in the nation. In addition, they would result in an incomplete and inaccurate Census, which would deprive policymakers, businesses, researchers and the public of the accurate data needed to ensure our nation's future well-being and prosperity. We urge the Administration and all members of Congress to reject these flawed and dangerous proposals.

VII. The U.S. Senate must support a seamless and expeditious transition in the leadership of the Census Bureau once a new Administration takes office in January 2009. It is critical that there be no disruption in the continuity of Census 2010 operations with the advent of a new Administration. It is true that the various components of these operations will be overseen and carried out by career employees who will stay on regardless of changes at the White House. However, the head of the Census Bureau plays a key role by inspiring confidence and trust in the Bureau. Any delay in the Bureau's leadership transition will impair the agency's ability to keep its 2010 operations completely on track.

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 reducing the undercount in the 2010 Census.