

The Honorable Wilbur Ross  
Secretary of Commerce  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

On behalf of the Monterey County Board of Supervisors, I write to express our opposition to the Department of Justice's (DOJ) request to add a question on citizenship to the 2020 Census. DOJ's stated rationale for its request – that it needs better citizenship data to better enforce the Voting Rights Act (VRA) “and its important protections against racial discrimination in voting” – belies the Department's hostile policies toward immigrants and will likely depress responses in immigrant communities.

DOJ's claims that the citizenship question is needed to enforce Section 2 of the VRA and to prevent racial discrimination in voting are unfounded. The Census Bureau already collects information on citizenship through the American Community Survey (ACS). This ongoing yearly survey provides more detailed information than the decennial Census, which enables the Census to focus more on population counts. The ACS' reliable citizenship data was used in 2010 by both DOJ and civil rights groups to monitor compliance with the VRA and will once again be utilized for the same purpose in 2020.

The Trump administration's aggressive immigration policies have already instilled fear among immigrant communities. Immigrant communities are less likely to report crimes, or even enroll their eligible U.S. citizen children in government health and nutrition programs. Early surveys have documented that some immigrants are afraid to provide information, or have given false information, to Census employees because they are fearful of how the information may be used. This is a concerning trend and would no doubt be worsened if a citizenship question was included in the 2020 Census.

Given the critical importance of the decennial census to distributing the number of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and drawing congressional and state legislative district lines, as well as allocating billions of dollars in federal funding to states and local governments, we urge you to oppose the DOJ's request for a citizenship question in the 2020 Census. As you work to ensure a fair and accurate census that encourages full participation, we believe that including a citizenship question would only serve to suppress participation and result in inaccurate data that does not truly reflect the makeup of our nation.

Sincerely,