

February 2, 2015

Jennifer Jessup, Departmental Paperwork Clearance Officer
Department of Commerce, Room 6616
14th and Constitution Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Ms. Jessup,

Please accept these comments for official consideration per 79 FR 71377 on the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 National Content Test:

- a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including whether the information shall have practical utility.

*As an end user of Census data and a member of the Census Bureau's National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic and Other Populations, I am an advocate for more relevant, robust, and useful census data for American Indian and Alaska Native tribal populations. Any new question wording or formatting warrants extensive field-testing; such a change pertaining to race, ethnicity, and Hispanic origin demands even further testing given the extensive variation and complexity of responses that stem from these questions. Such field-testing should be conducted with all populations and oversampling conducted for the hard to reach, hard to count, and small populations and subpopulations, including American Indian tribes. Regarding the practical utility of the proposed collection of information for American Indian tribes, it is not only necessary, but an obligation of the Bureau as mandated in Executive Order 13175—Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Governments—to establish regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration with tribal officials in the development of Federal policies that have tribal implications. **Changes to the collection and classification of racial and ethnic responses in the decennial census have the potential for significant positive or negative tribal implications and thus tribes must be formally consulted,** as should the National Congress of American Indians and other American Indian and Alaska Native national advocacy organizations, and the American Indian and Alaska Native representatives appointed to serve on the Census Bureau's National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic and Other Populations who not only have subject matter expertise, but also significant stakeholder relationships in Indian Country. **A letter sent to tribal leaders does not qualify as meaningful consultation with tribes.** Tribal consultations should take place before the 2015 National Content Test goes live in order to ensure that tribes have input into any changes in the proposed enumeration process of American Indian and Alaska Native populations. To this end, the proposed collection of information in the*

2015 content test is absolutely necessary, as is formal consultation with tribes and stakeholders prior to national testing.

- b) The accuracy of the agency's estimate of the burden (including hours and cost) of the proposed collection of information.

It is reasonable to expect that a combined race and Hispanic origin question could reduce both confusion and burden amongst those who struggled with these questions in previous censuses.

- c) Ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected.

The OMB minimum category definition for American Indian or Alaska Native as: "A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South American (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment" has remained stagnant for nearly twenty years. A timely update is warranted and research commencing this process is long overdue. At the least, efforts should be made by the Census Bureau to enable the disaggregation of this minimum collection of data at relevant and useful levels for tribal populations. There is not only extensive diversity between the indigenous peoples of North, South, and Central America, but also within these populations. The current OMB definition (and thus the aggregate race category for American Indian and Alaska Native in the census) is unsuitably broad.

Similarly, this Federal Register Notice is vague about any proposed changes to the sub question of American Indian and Alaska Native tribe that will be included in the 2015 National Content Test. The importance of the wording of the tribal sub question cannot be understated in yielding high quality, useful, and relevant tribal data. The current wording "Print name of enrolled or principal tribe" inhibits tribal governments from utilizing this data to get an enrolled count of their population versus those who are affiliated. While all responses are of course collected via self-identification, self-identified enrollment status is still valuable data for tribes. Given the extensive financial burden of conducting a census, few tribes have the resources to conduct large-scale demographic surveys of their tribal populations on a routine basis. As the country's largest peacetime mobilization, the U.S. Census is the most robust and updated data source of our nation's population. It should endeavor to do the same for tribal populations as it does all ethnic and racial populations.

Tribal data collected in the census would be of higher quality and more useful to tribes and researchers alike if the question asked for "principal tribe" or "affiliated tribe" and then had a follow up question that asked, "Are you enrolled in this tribe?" Yes/No. Tribal enrollment is undoubtedly a contentious space, however, it is one in which the Census has ventured since 1990, when the "enrolled" language was first introduced. Adding a follow up question will provide more tailored data specifically for tribal governments, which are currently poorly served by the census and to whom the U.S. government has a federal trust obligation. Moreover, several spaces could be provided to

enable respondents to identify more than one tribe given the high intertribal marriage rates amongst American Indians and Alaska Natives. The additional question and additional spaces would not be prohibitively burdensome to an Internet test and the benefits of actually rendering useful tribal data outweigh any drawbacks. As previously mentioned, any wording changes to the race question need to be extensively tested and government-to-government consultation with American Indian tribes is mandated.

- d) Ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on respondents, including through the use of automated collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

Utilizing the Internet and other automated techniques is practical for the general collection of information from respondents across the country. It should be noted that while some American Indian reservations and Alaska Native villages are incredibly remote with limited connectivity, others have quite sophisticated IT infrastructure. This spectrum of connectivity presents both a challenge and an opportunity for data collection. The Bureau should focus on extensive outreach in American Indian and Alaska Native communities to ensure that all reservation and village residents have access to the same instrument modes as the rest of the country. Differences in instrument modes could inject bias into the data. This is especially relevant to reservation residents given their disproportionate undercount.

Additionally, one benefit identified in this Notice for the online response mode is allowing more functionality and greater flexibility in designing questions compared to the space constrained paper versions. Currently there is only one response box available for an American Indian or Alaska Native respondent to write their tribal affiliation. If one has multiple tribal affiliations, then one is expected to fit all of those tribal names into the one response box. This has been a constraining practice that has plagued previous censuses and inhibited accurate tribal counts. The testing of multiple response spaces for tribal affiliation is recommended. One simply needs to look to the New Zealand Census as an example where indigenous respondents are given up to five spaces to identify separate tribal affiliations.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments.

Kind regards,



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