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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Mr. Arturo Vargas

<sup>†</sup> deceased

April 27, 2018

Ms. Sheleen Dumas  
Departmental Lead PRA Officer  
Office of the Chief Information Officer  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
14<sup>th</sup> and Constitution Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Submitted via email to [OIRA\\_Submission@omb.eop.gov](mailto:OIRA_Submission@omb.eop.gov)

Dear Ms. Dumas:

On behalf of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund, I write to provide comments in response to the Commerce Department Notice published on March 28, 2018 at 83 FR 13226, concerning planned revisions to the Census Bureau's 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) questionnaire.

NALEO Educational Fund is the nation's leading nonprofit organization that facilitates the full participation of Latinos in the American political process, from citizenship to public service. Our Board members and constituency encompass the nation's more than 6,600 Latino elected and appointed officials, and include Republicans, Democrats and Independents. NALEO Educational Fund is a national leader in Census outreach, community education and policy development. Since the 1990 Census, our organization has conducted outreach campaigns to promote the full and accurate count of the Latino community. Together with Spanish-language media and national organization partners, we helped coordinate the multi-media *ya es hora: ¡HAGASE CONTAR!* ("It's time: Make Yourself Count!") effort in 2010, which included partnerships with a broad network of local organizations; the dissemination of community education materials; a toll-free Census information hotline staffed by bilingual operators; technical assistance for community groups; and direct assistance to Latino residents with completing Census forms.

NALEO Educational Fund also has decades of experience working closely with its Latino elected official constituency, other government officials and partner organizations to promote public policies to achieve the most accurate count possible of the nation's population. NALEO Educational Fund has been a member of the U.S. Census Bureau's national advisory committees since 2000, and currently sits on the Bureau's National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic and Other Populations. NALEO Educational Fund is also the co-chair of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights' Census Task Force, and of the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda's Census Task Force. The organization also conducted two convenings of Latino stakeholders which provided representatives of the Census Bureau and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) the opportunity to obtain input from the Latino community on its re-design of the Census Hispanic origin and race questions.

NALEO Educational Fund applauds the continuing efforts of the Commerce Department and Census Bureau to update survey instruments in the interest of improving the accuracy of enumeration, and meeting federal agencies' data needs. We support revisions to the ACS questionnaire that reflect evolving changes in trends around telecommunications, transportation, employment, and income. However, we would like to take the opportunity provided by these comments to express our acute concerns about the process by which the Census Bureau arrived at the format of the ACS questions on Hispanic origin and race which were submitted to Congress in March 2018.

After conducting extensive research on improving the collection of data on Hispanic origin and race, the Census Bureau will not be able to move forward with its own recommendations about beneficial revisions for Census 2020 and the ACS. We write to reiterate our understanding that the Bureau's research shows that a combined Hispanic origin and race question that requests detailed information from respondents elicits the most complete and accurate data possible about their identification. We also note that this research demonstrates the feasibility of providing respondents with the opportunity to indicate multiple Hispanic national origin and sub-group identifications, which would also provide us with more complete data about the Latino community.

The failure of the OMB to revise its 1997 Statistical Policy Directive on Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity (1997 Standards) has prevented the Bureau from implementing its recommendations. The OMB undertook an effort to revise the standards with guidance from an Interagency Working Group it created and coordinated. The review process included the collection of public comments on Hispanic origin and race data categories, and was expected to conclude with a decision by December 2017. However, the OMB did not move forward with its revisions; as a result, the Bureau had to make what was an essentially last-minute decision to abandon the question format it had recommended for Census 2020 and the ACS, and submit a question format to Congress in March 2018 that its research indicated provided less accurate data on Hispanic origin and race. In fact, the reversal of the decision to provide Latinos with a meaningful opportunity to indicate multiple origins occurred so swiftly that the Bureau's 2018 End-to-End Test included this opportunity, while the question submitted to Congress did not. Ultimately, the Bureau must now use question formats it had not planned for, and is faced with several questions it must resolve before moving forward with the 2020 ACS.

Thus, in these comments, we urge the Census Bureau and Commerce Department to communicate with the OMB the critical need for adoption of updates to the 1997 Standards that will permit the Bureau to implement the recommendations that emerged from its research on Hispanic origin and race reporting. We also raise questions the Bureau needs to address because of the decision to use the specific two-separate-question format it submitted to Congress for the ACS.

### Separate Race and Ethnicity Questions Elicit High Rates of Nonresponse and Incomplete Response

The nation's 57 million Latinos are the country's second largest population group, and more than one of every six of the nation's residents is Latino. For the Census Bureau to compile the most accurate data possible about our population, it must ensure a full and accurate count of the Latino community and its characteristics. Over time, however, the Census Bureau had noted a growing mismatch between the specific categories set forth in the standalone race question slated for inclusion in the 2020 decennial Census and subsequent ACS questionnaires, and the ways in which many Latinos express their racial and ethnic background. The Bureau has consistently found that Latinos account for majorities of people who do not report themselves as belonging to any of the specific race categories. For example, more than 43% of Latinos chose "Some other race" or did not answer the race question on the 2010 decennial Census. Of those who chose "Some other race" and wrote in the race with which they identified, an overwhelming majority answered "Mexican," "Hispanic," "Latin American," or "Puerto Rican," which suggests they did not identify with any one of the specific racial groups set forth in the question.

The relatively large number of Latinos who do not identify with the specific racial categories set forth in a separate race question presents a major challenge for the consistency of Census data with the categories for reporting race that are included in the 1997 Standards, because the OMB minimum race categories do not include "Some other race." Between 2000 and 2010, the population classified as "Some other race," to whom the Census Bureau imputes a racial category, grew by one-quarter. In 2010, 6% of all decennial Census respondents – 19.1 million people – identified themselves as "Some other race," and 97% of those 19.1 million individuals were Latino. Latinos aged 18 to 44 are statistically more likely than their older counterparts to answer "Some other race" or to provide no answer to a separate Census question about race. Based in part on that observation, the Census Bureau expects that by 2020, "Some other race" could become the second largest racial group reported in the Census.

In addition to its concerns about declining rates of response to its race question, the Census Bureau has also raised well-founded questions around the quality of responses to the standalone Hispanic origin question. The separate-questions format employed in the 2010 decennial Census did not accommodate the reporting of multiple national origins by respondents of Latino ethnicity. However, evidence indicates that inability to record and report multiple Hispanic national origins results in the loss of detailed information about Latino identities. For example, in response to a differently-formatted ethnicity question on the 2000 decennial Census, the Bureau observed that more than 260,000 respondents attempted to report multiple Latino national origins, and that such reporting was most common among respondents under the age of 35, portending future increases in the percentages of Latinos identifying as being of more than one Latino national origin.

### More than a Decade of Testing Demonstrates Combined Question Approach Improves Data Collection on Hispanic Origin and Race

For more than a decade, the Bureau has undertaken extensive research to improve the reporting of Hispanic origin and race in the ACS and the decennial Census. This research includes the 2010 Alternative Questionnaire Experiment, the 2015 National Content Test, and the 2016 ACS test, all of which revealed a wealth of information pertinent to this task.

The Census Bureau's extensive testing repeatedly demonstrated lower nonresponse rates to a combined question than to separate race and Hispanic origin questions, regardless of the medium used to answer the questionnaire, or the language in which participants responded. "Some other race" responses also declined dramatically when a combined question was substituted for separate race and ethnicity questions. Latino respondents were more likely to convey their Latino ethnicity, and less likely to self-identify as White, when given a survey with a single combined race and ethnicity question. Moreover, when checkboxes and optional write-in areas immediately followed broad race and ethnicity categories, a combined question was as effective as separate questions in prompting survey respondents to provide detailed information about their national origins and ethnicities.

Use of a combined question format in test surveys did not result in the loss of any necessary data that would have been collected with separate questions. For example, the Census Bureau did not find any statistically significant differences in the rates at which respondents indicated Afro-Latino identity whether they were responding to separate or combined questions. Similarly, the percentage of people who self-identified as both Latino and White in a combined question – about 15% of all Latinos – was consistent with the percentage of Latinos who affirmed their White identity in a post-survey interview associated with questionnaires that employed separate questions.

In addition, the Bureau's testing found that providing Latinos with an opportunity to indicate multiple sub-group origins produced more detailed and complete data on the Latino community. Because of the consistency and quality of the findings of the Census Bureau's research on the combined question format that provided Latinos with an opportunity to indicate multiple origins, in May 2017, NALEO Educational Fund endorsed the Census Bureau's recommendation that future questionnaires use that revised format.

### Census Bureau and Commerce Department Must Advocate Revision of Standards for Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity

In March 2018, the Bureau presented to Congress a format with separate questions for Hispanic origin and race for use in Census 2020 and the ACS. In addition, the Hispanic origin question submitted to Congress does not provide respondents with a meaningful opportunity to indicate multiple Latino sub-group identifications. Unlike many of the formats used in the Bureau's tests (including the 2018 E-T-E test), the format provided to Congress does not include instructions to "Mark one or more boxes" when responding to the part of the question on Latino sub-group identifications. The Bureau has also indicated that it will not present information in any public data products that reflect information



provided by respondents who choose to mark more than one box. According to Bureau, it was compelled to make the foregoing choices because of the OMB Standards.

The format for the Hispanic origin and race questions the Bureau intends to use for the 2020 ACS fails to address the reasons for increasing rates of nonresponse and incomplete response to these questions by Latino and other survey participants, and will ultimately produce less accurate and complete data on the Latino population. As the nation's premier statistical agency charged with the most monumental surveying project in the United States – the decennial Census – the Census Bureau is a preeminent authority in all aspects of public data collection. Its recommendation of updates to the Hispanic origin and race questions must be accorded great weight. Thus, it is critical that the Bureau and the Department of Commerce strongly advocate with the OMB for a revision of the 1997 standards that will permit it to implement the recommended format which emerged from its research.

#### The Bureau Must Examine Issues which have Emerged from the Proposed ACS Hispanic Origin and Race Questions

The format for the Hispanic origin and race questions the Bureau submitted to Congress for the ACS raises several issues the Bureau needs to address. First, in terms of changes from the format currently used in the ACS, the separate race question would permit respondents who indicate that their race is "White" or "Black" to provide detailed information about their heritage. The race question also indicates several national origin examples for that detailed reporting.

We believe that the foregoing race question format will be confusing for Latino respondents, who have just provided information about their national or sub-group identification in the Hispanic origin question. For example, if a Latino respondent indicates that he or she is of Mexican origin in response to the Hispanic origin question, it is not clear that the respondent will understand how to answer the detailed origin question when the respondent next comes to the race question, particularly since none of the examples provided for detailed origins are those typically associated with various Latino origins. It is also problematic that none of the examples provided for detailed origins in the "Black" response are those some Latinos of Afro-Caribbean ancestry identify with, such as Dominican or Puerto Rican.

Finally, the Bureau's decision to use the separate Hispanic origin and race question format means that a fundamental issue facing ACS and decennial data collection is still unaddressed. According to the Bureau's projection, the growth of respondents identifying as "some other race" will continue, and the Bureau will continue to need to impute racial categories to a large number of respondents. Our nation's data on the Hispanic origin and racial identification of its residents will become even more incomplete and inaccurate in the future.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments, and for your ongoing efforts to produce quality data that enable our democracy and economy to thrive. If we may answer

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questions or provide additional information, please contact Rosalind Gold, Senior Director of Policy, Research, and Advocacy, at [rgold@naleo.org](mailto:rgold@naleo.org) or 213-747-7606.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arturo Vargas', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Arturo Vargas

cc: Congressional Hispanic Caucus  
Congressional Hispanic Conference

A large, light gray watermark logo in the background of the page. It features a stylized 'N' and 'E' forming a circle, with the text 'NALEO' in a bold, serif font and 'Educational Fund' in a sans-serif font below it.

NALEO  
Educational Fund