August 18, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-220, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), I'm writing to urge you to extend the statutory reporting deadlines for the 2020 Census. Given the significant and ongoing challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critically important that the U.S. Census Bureau be provided with additional time to ensure an accurate accounting of the nation's population.

As you're well aware, the distribution of a significant portion of federal taxpayer dollars is driven by census data. According to a report released late last year by the George Washington Institute of Public Policy, more than $1.5 trillion in annual federal funding is directed to states and localities based upon information that is collected by the Census Bureau. In California, counties receive over $11 billion in direct federal funding allocations, plus additional state subventions. California's counties rely on these dollars to help fund health care needs, economic development and infrastructure projects, public safety initiatives, and many other essential services.

Unfortunately, California has experienced greater undercounts than the rest of the nation in the past three censuses, which has resulted in our state losing out on hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding. Given the state's "hard-to-count" groups and communities – which includes low-income households, immigrants and people experiencing homelessness – California is once again vulnerable to an undercount as part of this year's census. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbates this vulnerability.

In the interest of protecting the health and safety of census workers and the American public at large, the Census Bureau has undertaken a series of modifications to its 2020 field operations. Adjustments include a previously announced plan to permit households to self-respond to the census until October 31, as well as allowing in-person follow-up operations to conclude at the end of October, instead of July 31.

In spite of statements from the Census Bureau that the aforementioned operational extensions were necessary to ensure a fair and accurate count given the challenges brought on by COVID-19, on August 3 the Census Bureau announced plans to end all field operations on September 30, instead of October 31. The Census Bureau cited current statutory reporting constraints as justification for accelerating the field data collection and self-response operations.

Given this most recent decision by the Census Bureau, it is critically important that Congress take immediate action to extend the statutory reporting deadlines for apportionment and redistricting data by four months – from December 31, 2020 to April 30, 2021, and from March 31, 2021 to July 31, 2021, respectively. This would allow the Census Bureau to extend its field operations. Incidentally, these proposed statutory deadlines are the same as those requested by Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham's in their April 13 Statement on 2020 Census Operation Adjustments Due to COVID-19.

Thank you for your attention to this critically important matter.

Sincerely,

Graham Knaus
Executive Director

cc: Senator Dianne Feinstein
            Senator Kamala Harris
            California House Delegation