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## Bringing in the Relief Part II: The Census Counts for Equity

By Nancy Wagman, Kids Count Director

The 2020 Census is hardly top of many people's minds right now. There are widespread demonstrations against historic and current racial injustices in Black communities. The country has officially sunk into a recession<sup>1</sup> and unemployment is at an historic high.<sup>2</sup> The deepening economic downturn threatens our state and local fiscal stability.<sup>3</sup> Our Commonwealth is reeling from a pandemic that has hit our communities of color and our nursing homes particularly hard.<sup>4</sup> But in very important ways all these events are connected to the 2020 Census, because **the census is ultimately about equity, power, and money.**

Community leaders' calls for racial equity include demands for better information about the disparate impacts of policies on communities of color. This information requires disaggregated data, and our most detailed demographic picture of our communities comes from the decennial census.<sup>5</sup> The pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of access to health care and emergency response, and state and local officials rely on census data for health care planning.<sup>6</sup> Much of the federal funding distributed to states and localities to address the effects of the pandemic and to provide economic relief is distributed based on U.S. Census Bureau population counts.

The equitable distribution of political power is intertwined with the accuracy of the census. Most directly, the census drives political representation. People who are not included in the decennial census counts are not included in reapportionment and redistricting calculations that policymakers use to draw national, state, and local legislative districts.

Historically, the Census Bureau has not been as successful at getting an accurate count of communities of color (especially Black and Brown communities) or an accurate count of low-income communities (including white residents) as it has at getting a count of wealthier white people. There are lots of

### Key Takeaways

- A complete and accurate count in the census has implications for equity, power, and money.
- More than \$3.3 billion in CARES Act funding comes to our Massachusetts communities based on population estimates from the census.
- Massachusetts might have received more federal relief had there not been an undercount in the 2010 Census.
- In 2020 it is particularly important the Census Bureau counts those they have historically missed: communities of color (especially Black and Brown), young children, and low-income (including white) residents.
- A complete and accurate count in the 2020 Census will help ensure that Massachusetts gets its fair share of power and money over the next 10 years.

reasons for this. People of color are more likely to rent homes than own, meaning they are more likely to move around. Immigrant communities may be hesitant to fill out a census form because of concerns about whether there might be impacts on immigration status. Over the past decades, the Census Bureau has historically had a harder time getting an accurate count of families that live in multigenerational or shared households, or non-traditional families. The Census Bureau has also had an increasingly difficult time getting an accurate count of young children. There are estimates that Massachusetts had an undercount of about 20,000 for children under age five in 2010.<sup>7</sup>

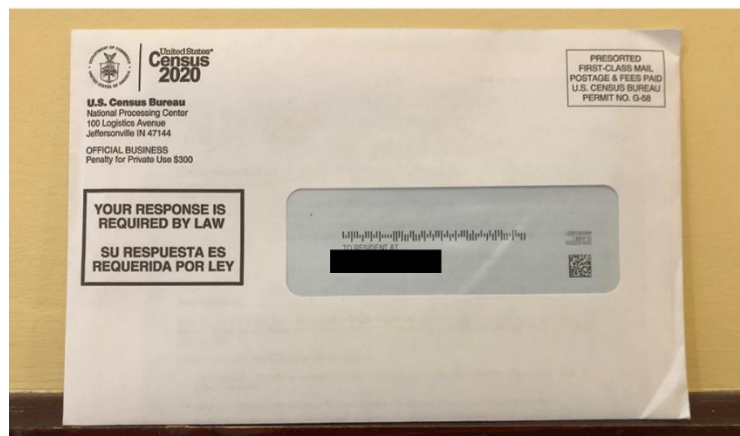
### The Census Counts for Billions

The risks of a census undercount are real and long-lasting. More than \$3.3 billion in funding is coming into our state and local communities from just one recent piece of federal legislation, and this total is directly affected by the decennial census of ten years ago. Moreover, it is precisely the people who were most likely missed by the 2010 Census – communities of color, immigrants, low-income residents, young children – who are among the people most vulnerable to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, most affected by the economic downturn, and most in need of the relief provided by these federal dollars.

### The Census, the Pandemic, and the CARES Act

Unfortunately, the 2020 Census was rolling out right as the pandemic hit. Events and activities designed to draw attention to the importance of the census were cancelled or put on hold. Census counts of young people were upended as colleges and universities abruptly shut down. In-person, community-based education efforts were cancelled or had to go virtual.

While the success of the 2020 Census has been affected by the pandemic, efforts to respond to the pandemic are themselves directly affected by the results of the 2010 Census a decade ago. In particular, the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) passed in March is an example of why a complete and accurate count of every person – especially low-income communities, immigrants, people of color, and young children – is important now more than ever.



Included in the CARES Act is funding to support state and local governments in their efforts to respond to and address the impacts of COVID-19, and these are the dollars most closely linked to the census.<sup>8</sup> The chronic census undercount of communities of color now means these same communities that have been hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic are the communities most likely missing out on assistance that they would have been entitled to.

### The Census and the Coronavirus Relief Fund

Most notably, the CARES Act included \$150 billion for the Coronavirus Relief Fund for state and local governments. Massachusetts will receive about \$2.67 billion in total for these state and local funds, and

the portion available for municipalities will also be distributed based on population.<sup>9</sup> As the U.S. Department of the Treasury states, “Amounts paid to States, the District of Columbia, U.S. Territories, and eligible units of local government are **based on population** as provided in the CARES Act. The CARES Act directs Treasury to **use U.S. Census Bureau data** for the most recent year for which data is available.” [Emphasis added.]<sup>10</sup>

Current population estimates are based on the 2010 Census. That means the 2010 Census undercount translates into a less equitable distribution of these funds. It is unclear how much more of this funding Massachusetts might have received had its population estimates been based on a complete and accurate 2010 Census count.

### The Census, the Education Stabilization Fund, and Counts of Low-Income Children

The CARES Act also included \$30.75 billion to support education across the country. Of this total, Massachusetts received \$50.8 million for what is known as the “Governor’s emergency relief fund.” There has not yet been official announcement of how Massachusetts will use this funding specifically, other than to support remote learning for students.<sup>11</sup> The state’s allocation of that national total is based on both the census estimates of the state’s total population of **people ages 5 to 24** and the estimates of the **number of children ages 5 to 17 in poverty**. Massachusetts also received \$214.9 million for K-12 education in the “Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund.” These funds are for school districts to use as needed, especially to respond to the immediate educational needs of students in light of school closures and the pandemic. Of the total coming to the state, \$193.4 million is exclusively reserved for distribution to local school districts, based **entirely on their census-estimated population of low-income school-aged children**.<sup>12</sup>



There are significant equity implications in this. The CARES Act directly targets these funds to support schools with low-income students, and the districts with larger low-income student populations get proportionately more funding. For these students – whose parents are more likely to be essential workers,<sup>13</sup> or who live in multigenerational families with older relatives who are more likely to have gotten sick, or who live in households with poor access to the internet necessary for remote learning – this additional funding is well-targeted.

Yet at the same time, the impact of the historic census undercount of young children – especially young children of color – is magnified in these allocations. Areas across the country where the undercount of young children is known to have been particularly significant in 2010 (Suffolk County in Massachusetts, for example)<sup>14</sup> are now particularly short-changed in the distribution of these funds that are driven by school-aged population estimates.

### The Census and Public Health Funding

The CARES Act also includes \$1.3 billion for community health centers nationwide to support their role in improving access to health care, especially for COVID-19 testing and diagnosis and the expansion of telehealth services to vulnerable communities. Massachusetts received \$34.2 million of this total,

directed to 38 health centers.<sup>15</sup> In addition to funding for community health centers, the CARES Act targets other public health funding to rural and “medically underserved” communities.<sup>16</sup> Funding for community health centers and other “medically underserved” services is determined by where there are insufficient numbers of health care providers for the population or high poverty areas. These calculations are based on census data.<sup>17</sup> A population undercount – particularly of low-income residents – can lead to an underestimation of the areas that are medically underserved.

### The Census and Other Funding

Other funding coming to Massachusetts from the CARES Act also relies on census data. Together, these funds point to the substantial **role of census data** in bringing federal money to Massachusetts, and the real risks of a census undercount.<sup>18</sup>

- **Community development** funding for communities, including emergency shelter funding
  - \$191.8 million
  - In part from population estimates which are based on the decennial census
- **Child Care Block Grant** to support early education and care
  - \$45.7 million
  - From state population estimates which are based on the decennial census
- **Fuel Assistance (LIHEAP)** for heating and weatherization for low-income households
  - \$27.2 million
  - From a complicated formula including data from the American Community Survey which is based on the decennial census
- **Substance misuse** prevention and treatment
  - \$13.9 million so far
  - In part from population estimates which are based on the decennial census
- **Dislocated Worker Grants** for training and job development for workers who have lost jobs
  - \$7.0 million
  - From state population estimates which are based on the decennial census
- **Head Start** for low-income, very young children
  - Massachusetts’ share of \$750 million not yet released
  - From estimates of the young child population which are based on the decennial census

### There Is Time to be Counted

There is no way to undo the undercounts of 2010. Fortunately, there is still time to make sure we do not repeat an undercount in 2020, even despite the pandemic and the recession. The 2020 Census count has been extended until October 31.<sup>19</sup> With the calls for racial equity and justice in our communities we can recognize the critical role of the census in ensuring that all our communities – especially the communities that have historically been left behind – are seen, are heard, and are counted.

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<sup>1</sup> National Bureau of Economic Research, “US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions,” <https://www.nber.org/cycles.html>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://massbudget.org/reports/pdf/6.3.2020%20Unemployment%20Insurance%20Update.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> See discussion of the impact of the recession in <https://medium.com/massbudget/the-anti-stimulus-budget-cuts-are-worse-for-the-economy-than-tax-increases-during-recessions-cb0cc5f072d7>.

- <sup>4</sup> See COVID-19 Daily Dashboard at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-response-reporting-and-analysis> here <https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/3-principles-for-an-antiracist-equitable-state-response-to-covid-19>.
- <sup>5</sup> <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/advanced?t=Race%20and%20Ethnicity&tid=ACSDT1Y2018.B01001A>.
- <sup>6</sup> <https://bhwh.hrsa.gov/shortage-designation/types>.
- <sup>7</sup> See <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/federal-rental-assistance-fact-sheets#MA>, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/mapping-black-homeownership-gap>, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2019/demo/Hard-to-Count-Populations-Brief.pdf>, and Appendix A in U.S. Census Bureau, [The Undercount of Young Children](#), February 2014.
- <sup>8</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/cares>.
- <sup>9</sup> <https://medium.com/massbudget/thats-a-relief-federal-fiscal-relief-to-massachusetts-in-recently-passed-legislation-67c1c5f72e97>.
- <sup>10</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/cares/state-and-local-governments>.
- <sup>11</sup> <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/06/MA-GEER-Certification-and-Agreement-4-29-20-Reviewed.pdf>.
- <sup>12</sup> ] See <https://medium.com/massbudget/thats-a-relief-federal-fiscal-relief-to-massachusetts-in-recently-passed-legislation-67c1c5f72e97> as well as CARES Act, Sections 18002 and 18003 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/748/text/enr?r=10>. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is distributing a total of \$193.8 million to school districts using other funds as well to provide \$20,000 to school districts that are not eligible for the Title I funding-based distribution. See <http://www.doe.mass.edu/grants/entitlement-allocation.aspx?view=code&fy=2021&code=113>.
- <sup>13</sup> [https://massbudget.org/reports/pdf/MAundocessentials\\_20200604\\_FINAL.pdf](https://massbudget.org/reports/pdf/MAundocessentials_20200604_FINAL.pdf).
- <sup>14</sup> <https://countallkids.org/prb-resources-to-improve-the-count-of-young-children-in-the-2020-census-june-18-update/>.
- <sup>15</sup> <https://bphc.hrsa.gov/program-opportunities/coronavirus-disease-2019/faq>; <https://bphc.hrsa.gov/emergency-response/coronavirus-cares-FY2020-awards/ma>.
- <sup>16</sup> See, for example, CARES Act Section 3212 on telehealth and sections 3401 and 3402 on funding for the health care workforce <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/748/text/enr?r=10>.
- <sup>17</sup> Medically Underserved Areas/Populations are areas or populations designated by HRSA as having too few primary care providers, high infant mortality, high poverty, or a high elderly population <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/mua-find#:~:text=Medically%20Underserved%20Areas%2FPopulations%20are,or%20a%20high%20elderly%20population>.
- <sup>18</sup> <https://www.hud.gov/hudprograms/esg#:~:text=Funding%20Distribution%3A%20After%20setting%20aside,for%20the%20previous%20fiscal%20year>, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/2020-cares-act-ccdbg-supplemental-funding-allocations-for-states-and-territories>, [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocs/comm\\_liheap\\_supplreleasedclstaterterr fy2020.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocs/comm_liheap_supplreleasedclstaterterr fy2020.pdf), <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/covid19-programs-funded-samhsa.pdf>, <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/DWGs/pdfs/19%20-%20covid-massachusetts-disaster.pdf>, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/media/press/2020/cares-act-gives-extra-750-million-for-head-start-program>.
- <sup>19</sup> <https://2020census.gov/en/news-events/operational-adjustments-covid-19.html>.