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**NCAI and NARF Joint Statement on Recent Census Announcement and Call for Congress to Extend Census Operations**

## NCAI and NARF Joint Statement on Recent Census Announcement and Call for Congress to Extend Census Operations

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[NCAIPress@ncai.org](mailto:NCAIPress@ncai.org) (mailto:NCAIPress@ncai.org) / [Natalie Landreth](mailto:Natalie.Landreth@narf.org)  
/ [nlandreth](mailto:nlandreth@narf.org) (mailto:nlandreth@narf.org)@narf.or  
(mailto:NCAIPress@ncai.org)g (mailto:NCAIPress@ncai.org)

**WASHINGTON** - The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) applaud the decision by the U.S. Census Bureau to request statutory authority from Congress to extend 2020 Census operations by 120 days.

The U.S. Census Bureau has requested that field data collection and self-response for the 2020 Census be extended until October 31, 2020 due to the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which has already resulted in a suspension of all census field operations. The Bureau further requested that apportionment counts be delivered to the President by April 30, 2021 and redistricting data be delivered to the states by July 31, 2021.

The U.S. Census Bureau's in-person field operations are critical to getting a complete count of rural Indian Country and urban American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/ANs). Although millions of Americans can respond to the census questionnaire through the Internet, by phone, or by mail, those options are largely unavailable to AI/ANs. Most AI/AN tribal areas and reservations are located in geographically isolated areas that lack access to broadband and reliable cellular coverage. AI/ANs living on reservations or in rural areas typically lack street addresses which prevents them from receiving census materials by mail. These barriers and others, such as language and illiteracy, are why the U.S. Census Bureau has designated many households in tribal areas to receive their 2020 Census questionnaire directly from Bureau staff visiting their communities.

The impact of the U.S. Census Bureau's suspension of field operations on Indian Country is profound. While the national response self-response rate is over 48 percent, the self-response rates in many tribal areas that depend on in-person enumeration are in the low single-digits

- Fort Apache Reservation (Arizona) - self-response rate of 1.7 percent;
- Crow Reservation (Montana) - self-response rate of 2.3 percent;
- Pine Ridge Reservation (South Dakota) - self-response rate of 2.9 percent;

- Acoma Pueblo (New Mexico) - self-response rate of 3.7 percent;
- Pala Reservation (California) - self-response rate of 4.4 percent; and
- Turtle Mountain Reservation (North Dakota) - self-response rate of 4.9 percent.

“The COVID-19 pandemic is having an unprecedented impact on efforts to get a complete count in Indian Country,” said Natalie Landreth, Senior Staff Attorney at NARF. “Native Americans living on tribal lands had an undercount of at least 4.9 percent in 2010, the highest of any population group. If Bureau staff and their national and tribal partners do not have sufficient time to complete the count of urban Natives and those living on reservations, entire tribal nations could virtually disappear. That will cost tribes and the State and local communities where they are located billions of dollars in lost federal funding, and deprive AI/ANs of their constitutional right to vote.”

“Following safety guidelines in the wake of COVID-19 and having a full and accurate count in the 2020 Census should not be mutually exclusive. We call on Congress to ensure tribal nations are not forgotten nor left behind,” said NCAI CEO Kevin Allis. “The data collected from the 2020 Census will inform the formulas used to determine funding and political representation that will be crucial to tribal communities moving forward as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. For too long, Indian Country has been undercounted, underfunded, and underrepresented. We hope that this extension will allow enough time for field operations to resume and safely provide the in-person enumeration that is essential to a full and accurate count of AI/ANs in this country.”

NCAI and NARF encourage Members of Congress to work with the U.S. Census Bureau and provide the Bureau with the legal authority to extend 2020 Census Operations by 120 days. In a time of crisis, we must all unite to ensure that all Americans, including AI/ANs, are counted.

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**About the Native American Rights Fund:**

Founded in 1970, NARF is the oldest and largest non-profit dedicated to asserting and defending the rights of Indian tribes, tribal organizations, and individual Indians nationwide. For the past 48 years, NARF has represented over 275 Tribes in 31 states in such areas as tribal jurisdiction, federal recognition, land claims, hunting and fishing rights, religious liberties, and voting rights. For more information, visit [www.narf.org](http://www.narf.org) ([http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001HgBlhv2bihArzSjqHbq1-V2UrG6bdIP2rcVyQ-kWjamFE1B89LwGtELeZmrG1fReCVfmLRxkeMN-PcO\\_p-wTDgO2VJ3kGQEi3RLoc-7cvYO6lWF90QFSYOzTcnhyw1bnkuCYdGPq6m4=&c=ujW5qlGtxARHcYSxp7PpWJ488VgVlzp0xTSnKW4UpR4racd8Zl](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001HgBlhv2bihArzSjqHbq1-V2UrG6bdIP2rcVyQ-kWjamFE1B89LwGtELeZmrG1fReCVfmLRxkeMN-PcO_p-wTDgO2VJ3kGQEi3RLoc-7cvYO6lWF90QFSYOzTcnhyw1bnkuCYdGPq6m4=&c=ujW5qlGtxARHcYSxp7PpWJ488VgVlzp0xTSnKW4UpR4racd8Zl))



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1516 P Street NW, Washington, DC 20005  
Phone: (202) 466-7767, Fax: (202) 466-7797

<https://www.congress.gov/legislation/bills/116/1077>

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