



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** SEPTEMBER 5, 2018

**TO:** THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

**DOCKET TITLE:**

Consideration of a Resolution Establishing a Complete Count Committee for the 2020 U.S. Census.[ROLL-CALL VOTE]

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**ISSUE:** The establishment of a Complete Count Committee for the 2020 U.S. Census to ensure an accurate count of the City's population.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council:

- 1) Approve the resolution (Attachment 1) establishing an Alexandria Complete Count Committee;
- 2) Authorize the City Manager to select a person to serve as Chair of the Committee; and
- 3) Authorize the City Manager to solicit and appoint members to the group.

**BACKGROUND:** The United States Constitution requires the Federal Government to conduct a national census every ten years. The next Census will be in April of 2020. To make this census as accurate a count of the country's population as possible, the U.S. Bureau of the Census has requested that local governments establish "complete count committees." The purpose of these committees is to encourage local residents to participate in the Census. Considering the Census Bureau's request and because the City has been undercounted in the past, there are good reasons to establish and fund an Alexandria complete count committee for the 2020 U.S. Census. The committee will need to be established by the end of 2018.

While the Census Bureau did not identify a statistically significant undercount for Alexandria's total population estimate for the 2010 U.S. Census, they found that certain demographic groups are more likely to be undercounted at a national level. The undercount was highest among minorities with an 2.06% undercount of the nation's non-Hispanic Black population and a 1.54% of the nation's Hispanic population. Renters were undercounted by 1.09%, and children under the age of 4 were undercounted by 0.72%. As a result, minorities,

renters, and families with children especially should be targets of the 2020 Complete Count Committee's efforts. The U.S. Government proposed citizenship question if it remains (despite litigation) as a census question will likely increase the probability of undercounting.

The Census Bureau identified hard-to-count tracts based on the share of households that mailed back their census questionnaires in 2010. A tract is considered "hard to count" if fewer than 73 percent of households returned their completed questionnaires. In Alexandria, hard-to-count tracts are located in and around the Alexandria West, Beauregard, Landmark, and Arlandria neighborhoods. In addition to targeting populations that have historically been undercounted, the 2020 Complete Count Committee should also focus their efforts on these hard-to-count tracts.

The City's official population figures for 1990, 2000, and 2010 were not adjusted by the Federal Government to take into consideration population undercounts. An undercount for 2020 will have three effects. First, it will mean less money from the Federal Government which often distributes certain monetary grants to State and local government based on Census data; these grants include Head Start which is allocated based on the number of low-income children in a jurisdiction, and the Social Services Block Grant which is allocated based on states' total population relative to the entire US population. Second, a more accurate census count, rather than one with a large undercount, allows the City to plan its programs, services and land use with more confidence and accuracy. The ability to plan is further jeopardized because future periodic, between-census American Community Surveys will use the 2020 U.S. Census as a base; if the base is inaccurate the data from future surveys will also be inaccurate. Third, an undercount would result through reapportionment of legislative districts in diminishment of representation in the General Assembly and U.S. House of Representatives.

The 2010 Complete Count Committee included representatives from neighborhood associations, service organizations and City agencies and sponsored public outreach events, distributed census marketing information and worked with partnership organizations to promote the Census. See Attachment 2 for a final report and listing of members. As a result of the City's Complete Count Committee and the local Census Bureau office, the rate of return of Census forms by post was increased and improved beyond the national rate of return and the City's rate of return for the previous 2000 Census. This is especially noteworthy since Alexandria was the only jurisdiction in Northern Virginia to increase its response rate in 2010 compared to 2000.

**DISCUSSION:** The Alexandria Complete Count Committee (the "Committee") should represent a broad cross section of Alexandria's population. It is particularly important that the Committee have strong representation from civic associations, community-based organizations and organizations that serve the population that is most likely to be undercounted. In 2010, the group included representatives of **26** neighborhood associations, service organizations and City agencies.

The Committee will work together to develop a program to educate and promote public participation in the upcoming Census, using the successes of the 2010 effort as a starting point. Highlights of the 2010 Complete Count program included:

- Held ten meetings from June 2009 through April 2010 to discuss and review policies on engaging schools, marketing and promotional materials and engaging the faith community.
- Worked with a public relations firm to create a slogan, "Yes We Count," to include in promotion and marketing materials.
- Employed "giveaways," at events such as t-shirts, pencils, tote bags, hats, coffee cups and balls.
- Installed bus and store posters designed by the Northern Virginia Community College design studio and

written in English, Spanish, Arabic, and Amharic.

- Commissioned a public service announcement by a T.C. Williams High School student that aired on cable channels 70 and 71.
- Worked with the City's Communications Office on website, Facebook, and Twitter posts.
- Offered promotional items designed specifically for faith-based organizations.
- Sent direct mailers targeting households in zip codes that had low rates of return of the postal Census form.
- Had a presence at community events such as T.C. Williams Back to School Night, Citizens Day at City Hall, Charles Houston Pool Dedication, and the annual Saint Patrick's Day Parade.
- Targeted outreach to census tracts with lower rates of return such as hosting information tables in building lobbies and targeted canvassing located within these census tracts.

For a complete list of the 2010 Committee's activities see Attachment 2.

**Composition:** Similar to 2010, it is proposed that the Complete Count Committee consist of up to 35 members representing neighborhood civic associations, community-based organizations and nonprofits, business organizations, and city agencies. Members of the Committee will be appointed by the City Manager following a call for nominations publicized through the City's eNews service, notices to respective organizations, and the City's website. The City Manager will designate the Chair of the Task Force.

The Department of Planning and Zoning will staff the Committee with support from other departments as appropriate. For the 2010 Committee, additional support from other City agencies included the Police Department, Health Department, and Department of Community and Human Services.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** For the 2000 Census, City Council approved a budget of \$25,000 for the Complete Count Committee. For 2010, City Council approved a budget of \$30,000 to support the same level of effort. For 2020, \$30,000 or more is contemplated. A work program will be developed once the Committee has been established; programs may be similar to those of 2000 and 2010 but will also include social media and other new outreach tools effective in reaching a broad audience, including younger people (and are free).

Staff estimates a minimum of 500 hours of City Staff will be needed to support the Committee. The estimate consists of staff time that will be spent on meeting preparation and attendance, post-meeting activities, community outreach, and preparation of the annual status report. The Department of Planning and Zoning Neighborhood Planning and Community Development Office will lead the staff effort.

#### **ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment 1 - Resolution

Attachment 2 - 2010 Complete Count Committee Final Report

Attachment 3 - Presentation

#### **STAFF:**

Emily A. Baker, Deputy City Manager

Karl Moritz, Director, Department of Planning and Zoning

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