

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

STEVE BULLOCK
GOVERNOR



MIKE COONEY
LT. GOVERNOR

August 4, 2020

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary of Commerce
United States Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross,

Montana is the fourth-largest state in the nation covering an expansive 147,040 square miles. Our vast, rugged state is what makes Montana an ideal place to live. It's what also makes Montana among the most challenging places in the country to count.

As of this letter, just 56.6 percent of the households in Montana have been counted in the 2020 Census. The U.S. Census Bureau has now confirmed reports that it will end the decennial count a month before it's extended deadline, a decision that will have devastating and lasting impacts in Montana and other frontier states around the nation.

The U.S. Census Bureau's suspension of all field operations from March-May set our state behind and has put us in a position from which it may not be possible to recover. More than a quarter of Montana households did not receive a mailed invitation to respond to the Census this spring as these homes don't get mail at a traditional street style address. Most of the residents living on two of the seven Indian Reservations in Montana still haven't received their Census invitation. U.S. Census Bureau employees won't even start knocking on doors to do in-person follow up in Montana until mid-August, just six weeks before the new September 30 deadline you are imposing.

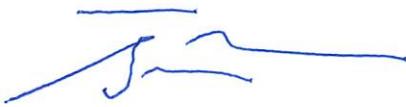
Montana is not alone in experiencing deep and unprecedented effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our administration is working first to protect the health and safety of our state's 1.06 million residents. We are also doing all we can to offset the short and long-term impacts this will have on our economy, our communities and our families. We've allocated CARES Act money to support Census promotion and outreach in Montana, in addition to the original budget our state had to support the decennial count. This funding is being deployed to low-response areas of the state in hopes of being able to quickly make up for the time lost this spring due to COVID-19. But Montana needs every single day between now and October 31 to ensure not one household is left out.

Page 2
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August 4, 2020

Today, an estimated 525,000 Montanans have not been counted in the 2020 Census. If the Census Bureau continues to move the goal posts of the decennial count, we fear entire communities in Montana will go uncounted and therefore unrepresented in our democracy. These communities rely on an accurate Census to provide critical funding for schools, healthcare, and highways. Without an accurate count the fabric of Montana will be detrimentally impacted for at least the next ten years.

For these reasons, we urge the U.S. Census Bureau to stick with its extended deadline of October 31 to ensure every single Montanan is counted. Our future depends on it.

Sincerely,



STEVE BULLOCK
Governor



MIKE COONEY
Lieutenant Governor
Chair of the Montana
Complete Count
Committee

Cc: Senator Jon Tester
Senator Steve Daines
Representative Greg Gianforte