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**Gale A. Brewer, Borough President**

**October 29, 2019**

**Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President  
Testimony before the New York City Council Committees on Governmental  
Operations Joint with Committees on Immigration and State & Federal  
Legislation  
Oversight Hearing: Preparations for a Complete Count in the 2020 Census**

My name is Gale A. Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you to Chairs Cabrera, Menchaca, and Cohen, as well as the members of the Committees on Governmental Operations, Immigration, and State & Federal Legislation, for the opportunity to testify today.

Ensuring a complete count in next year's census is beyond essential. Under normal circumstances pulling off a decennial census in the United States requires a herculean civic effort.

To get it done and done right requires a rare American all-hands-on-deck we're-in-this-together everyone-counts type national trust.

But we are NOT living under normal circumstances. Our national civic trust levels are at modern-day lows while the scapegoating and targeting of vulnerable and marginalized communities are at record highs.

As the elected president of the Borough of Manhattan, I represent roughly 1.7 million residents, of whom an estimated 28 percent are foreign-born. Manhattan has numerous hard-to-count census tracts, particularly in low-income and immigrant communities, as well as in areas with concentrations of public housing.

In Manhattan in 2010, the hardest count Census tracts were in Central Harlem and East Harlem, but also Midtown, Chinatown, Lower East Side as well as Battery Park City, the Financial District and the South Street Seaport. Since 9/11/2001, the Financial District has grown almost tripling from 20,000 to almost 70,000 residents and Hudson Yards is a city in a city.

There's a constant risk of an undercount of immigrant populations especially in cities like ours. An undercount could hurt everything from our federal funding allocations to our distribution of seats in the House of Representatives, not to mention lock many of those changes in for a decade until the 2030 census.

With these concerns in mind, last year I responded to the Commerce Department's request for comments on the citizenship question, the inclusion of which would have undermined the goal of an accurate and complete count in these already hard-to-count neighborhoods by spreading fear and anxiety among residents, leading to decreased response and participation rates.

Last year, I led the a delegation to Providence, Rhode Island, the site of the Census Bureau's only nationally-representative "dry run" end-to-end rehearsal for the 2020 Census. I was proud to be hosted by Providence Mayor Jorge O. Elorza and to be joined by representatives from all parts of city government and civil society: from members and staff from the City Council, to officials from CUNY, the Department of City Planning, and other sectors of city- and state-level government, to representatives of several Community Boards; to leaders from non-profit organizations like LatinoJustice, Community Service Society, the NYC Central Labor Council, the Asian American Foundation, and the Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights; and business groups such as ABNY.

The Providence trip was one of many actions taken by my office's Complete Count Committee, which first convened last summer, with the goal of uniting representatives of a wide span of organizations – from universities, to the offices of the Mayor and Governor, to community boards, to non-profits, to religious organizations, to resident associations, to labor unions and arts community.

The message here is clear.

While the necessary consensus, the necessary effort and resolve to get this done isn't coming from Washington, New York City is stepping up to the plate.

While, of course, City government has a big role to play in ensuring a proper census count, communities and organizations on the ground are those most capable of reaching people in hard-to-count census tracts.

That's why my office started the "Manhattan Counts" initiative, which has worked to fund and support NYC-based culturally competent initiatives that help communicate the importance of the census, and make sure everyone is counted.

With our expense monies, we funded 12 trusted organizations, with proven track records, which serve thousands of residents and have robust knowledge and connections in communities that are disproportionately undercounted in decennial Censuses.

This has led to an outpour of innovative and wide-ranging solutions, efforts we have been thrilled to support. One such effort is that of the Interfaith Center of New York, which in partnership with several faith groups like the Federation of Protestant Welfare Association, Catholic Charities and the UJA Federation, for instance, has conducted outreach and provided faith leaders Census related sermon notes for religious services in order to communicate the importance of the Census.

Another partnership we have pursued has been that of Uptown Grand Central, whose launch of their East 125th Street Counts Initiative promises to blanket this busy commercial corridor with Census merchandise, messaging, pop-up tents and tabling so as to mobilize and raise awareness among the local small businesses community to the importance of Census data, for them and their consumers.

In addition, we funded non-profit organizations that work with the Muslim, Chinese, Korean and Latinx communities, as well as groups that will produce theatre and art that focus on the census. We are going to bring all of the art institutions in Manhattan together to produce edgy art that is relevant to the census!

We also plan to support training of the individuals who deliver food to the homebound, as these are often the most trusted people in the senior and disabled person's life, and with an iPad or laptop they can help to fill out the census questions.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. I look forward to working with you to ensure a complete count and defend New Yorkers from the many perils that underrepresentation will bring.