

**COMMITTEE ON  
APPROPRIATIONS**

SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE,  
AND RELATED AGENCIES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS,  
AND RELATED PROGRAMS

<http://www.meng.house.gov>  
[www.facebook.com/repgracemeng](http://www.facebook.com/repgracemeng)  
twitter: @repgracemeng



**Grace Meng**

**Congress of the United States**

**Sixth District, New York**

November 30, 2017

**CONGRESSIONAL ASIAN PACIFIC  
AMERICAN CAUCUS**

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER

CHAIR  
TASK FORCE ON  
APPROPRIATIONS

SENIOR AND  
REGIONAL WHIP

CONGRESSIONAL KIDS  
SAFETY CAUCUS  
CO-CHAIR

The Honorable Mick Mulvaney  
Director  
Office of Management and Budget  
Eisenhower Executive Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Director Mulvaney:

Collection of complete and accurate data in the 2020 Census is essential to ensure that Census data collection is efficient, and produces insights that advance economic development and the fair allocation of public resources. Therefore, I urge you to revise the standards in Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Records to allow implementation of a ***Combined Question on Race and Ethnicity*** for the 2020 Census. The Census Bureau is required by law to submit the final questions for the 2020 Census to Congress by March 31, 2018. Immediate action by OMB is required to ensure a complete and accurate count for every person in the United States.

Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, last revised in 1997, requires the collection of race and ethnicity data based on a two-question approach. Surveys first ask a question about Hispanic ethnicity, followed by a second question collecting detailed information on racial identification. Starting with the 2010 Census, the Census Bureau undertook a program of research focused on collecting high quality race and ethnic data. This research culminated in an extensive National Content Test in 2015 that tested both the traditional two-question approach as well as a new concept based on a question that asked for both racial and Hispanic ethnicity identification through a single or ***Combined Question***.

The Census Bureau published the results of their research on February 28, 2016 and concluded:

"The combined question with detailed checkboxes design supported the research objectives of increasing reporting within the standard OMB categories, decreasing item nonresponse, improving accuracy and reliability, and achieving similar or higher levels of detailed reporting for all major groups. The results of this research indicate that the optimal question format is **combined question with detailed checkboxes**."


The Census Bureau widely circulated its research to inform a broad array of stakeholders, and provided the research to inform the Federal Interagency Working Group on Race and Ethnicity, sponsored by the Office of the Chief Statistician of the United States. This working group has been studying this issue for over four years and is charged with submitting a report and recommendations regarding potential revisions to the standards in Statistical Policy Directive No. 15.

The Census Bureau and many of its stakeholders support adoption of a single-question format because research has proven that this design captures the highest volume of accurate, self-reported data, and results in the greatest reduction in burden to the Census Bureau, which must interpret or impute data for non-conforming or missing responses. In fact, in the absence of alterations to the current format of government survey questions about race and ethnicity, the frequency with which subjects provide vague answers or no answer at all is likely to increase, and the effort and expense required to maintain the quality and usefulness of data will increase.

The decennial census is fundamentally important for sustaining our democracy and providing critical information to support good policy decisions and fuel economic growth. Since 1787, the United States Constitution has required a census every 10 years to apportion the seats in the House of Representatives among the States and to uphold the Constitution's guarantee of equal representation. State, local, and tribal governments rely on census data to make informed decisions. Census data support the allocation of over \$600 billion of federal funds annually to meet many of the most important needs of our country. Both large and small businesses use census data to inform decisions to produce economic growth and new job creation. It is imperative that all populations be accurately represented in Census data to minimize the burden to the government of producing statistical knowledge, and to ensure that all Americans receive their fair share of the important resources that will be allocated with 2020 Census data.

I urge you to take immediate action to issue revisions to the standards in Statistical Policy Directive No. 15 to allow the use of a ***Combined Question*** to collect the most complete and accurate data on Race and Ethnicity in the 2020 Census.

Sincerely,

  
Grace Meng  
Member of Congress