

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

STEVE BULLOCK
GOVERNOR



MIKE COONEY
LT. GOVERNOR

April 2, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Ross,

We are all experiencing the diverse impacts that COVID-19 is having on our country. Here in Montana, my administration is working first to protect the health and safety of our state's 1.06 million residents. That work includes protecting against the spread of the illness. In Montana, we've closed public schools and college campuses, and are limiting public gatherings and directing Montanans to stay home to slow the spread of COVID-19. We are also doing all we can to offset the short and long-term impacts this will have on our economy, our communities, our families and the 2020 Census.

We support the decision by the U.S. Census Bureau to suspend all field operations and cancel events through the majority of April. However, we also recognize this suspension runs counter to the Census Bureau's efforts to obtain a complete count. The suspension impacts many Bureau operations including the update/leave delivery of forms to household doors, the count of those experiencing homelessness, group quarters counts including colleges and nursing homes, and door-to-door non-response follow up scheduled to begin in May.

The effects of social distancing also impact the efforts by complete count committees, non-profits, and partner organizations working to educate residents on the importance of responding to the 2020 Census. It is likely these efforts will continue to be hampered for some time because of the public health emergency and the focus by residents on immediate health and financial concerns, rather than filling out the 2020 Census form.

Montana's frontier nature, our significant share of hard-to-count residents, seven tribal reservations, and our low population density over a large land area present significant challenges to achieving an accurate count. Additionally, significant areas of the state have limited broadband access and many Montana households do not receive mail delivery to their home. The lack of social contact due to COVID-19 and the suspension of the update/leave delivery of forms to the door will impact the completeness and accuracy of the state's count.

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Many planned efforts to achieve high self-response rates from hard-to-count populations and rural geographic areas are no longer viable due to COVID-19 response measures, including those mandated by the U.S. Census Bureau. More time is needed for effective outreach.

For these reasons, I urge the U.S. Census Bureau to extend the deadline for Census submission beyond August 14, 2020 to at least September 30, 2020 ensure every Montanan – and all residents across the country – are accurately counted.

In Montana, we must ensure that everyone is counted in the 2020 Census. Our schools, hospitals, highways, communities and families depend on it.

Sincerely,



STEVE BULLOCK
Governor