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## Maryland DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

April 6, 2020

Dear Clergy:

Census 2020 is now upon us. Maryland is currently above the national average self-response rate so far - but we will need to do better. The COVID-19 virus is also upon us and an accurate Census count is more important than ever. The Census is essential to emergency planning, and a successful count this year informs the number of vaccines we receive next year. It has presented unprecedented challenges to how we worship in every faith community. It has also had a significant impact on the ways we are able to reach Marylanders to encourage them to complete their Census forms.

The Maryland Department of Planning (Planning) continues its outreach plan - especially in communities that have been historically hard to count. Our efforts include radio, TV and digital marketing. However, we had also included bus signs, billboards and community-based events to reach people in their communities. Unfortunately, the effect of some of these traditional tools is now diminished due to social distancing and the stay-at-home order. Many faith leaders have already clearly and passionately reminded their congregations of the importance of responding to the Census. For those efforts, I am nothing but grateful. I am writing to request your continued assistance in leading your congregation to participate online, by phone, or by mail and respond to the 2020 Census.

Participation is power. Our Census numbers influence programs and policy. Beyond redistricting, the count is also the basis for the allocation of over \$675 billion in federal funding for critical, life-saving programs. Over the course of the last ten years, Maryland lost out on approximately \$1 billion in federal funding due to people not responding during the 2010 Census. Every Marylander not counted represents \$18,250 over 10 years that the state does not receive. Our communities cannot allow that to happen again. The latest research indicates that there is \$1.5 trillion dollars in Census derived federal spending with over \$16 billion going to Maryland each year.

Crucial programs such as emergency services, school lunches, Headstart programs, homeless aid, transit and transportation, public health, including vaccine allocations, and more rely on Census-derived funding. I am sure you can understand the importance of having a complete count for every community in our state. Each person of faith can do their part in raising a voice for others by participating in the Census and encouraging others to do so. Maryland's religious diversity means that our prayers are not always the same - but our civic mission must align. As a pastor told me, "The Census unites us." As clergy myself, I have experienced how hard this pandemic has been on our respective congregations. I have not been able to preside at baptisms or weddings and cannot continue with prison ministry at this time.

I also know that the faith community has a distinctive voice for getting the word out. You are the trusted voices within your communities and can best help spread the word about the critical nature of the Census. I hope that you will join in this mission by harnessing the power of people of faith to respond to the civic duty to be counted. After speaking to a Muslim group, a woman told me, "I see now, the Census is not about me, it is about my community."

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have and even participate in any video sermons or other messaging you are planning. Planning truly appreciates and values your assistance and we hope that we can count on you to help your community be counted. Please know that I join you in praying for all those affected by the virus. At so many levels, our challenge is to provide healing and more importantly, hope. One important way we can all help to defeat this virus that we cannot see is to make sure all of our people are seen. To do this though - they must respond to the Census.

Please reach out to Lorena Rivera, Census Director at [lorena.rivera@maryland.gov](mailto:lorena.rivera@maryland.gov), Randall Nixon, Associate Director at [randall.nixon2@maryland.gov](mailto:randall.nixon2@maryland.gov), or myself if we can be of service. If you would like more information, please visit [census.maryland.gov](http://census.maryland.gov).

Peace,



Robert S. McCord  
Secretary

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