



Montana Districting and Apportionment Commission

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Senator Jon Tester
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Thank you for paying attention to the extremely time sensitive topic of deadlines for the 2020 Census. We are concerned about the fluidity of deadlines for collecting data.

This issue is particularly important to us as the independent commission authorized by the Montana Constitution to draw the boundaries of congressional and legislative districts every 10 years using population data from the most recent U.S. Census. Our work depends on a complete and accurate count. The people of Montana and the rest of the nation deserve to be represented in accordance with an accurate count of every person living in the United States.

While extending the deadlines may create some issues, the most recent development of ending operations on September 30, 2020, is a much worse proposition. Nationally, 4 out of 10 households are yet to be counted. In Montana, the numbers are even worse. With the rural nature of much of our state, barely more than half of Montanans had self-responded to the Census as of July 31.

In rural states like Montana, personal outreach is necessary to ensure the most accurate count. While many states' residents were able to fill out Census forms online in early March, many Montana residents were forced to rely on information provided in the Census's update-leave efforts, which were delayed until Census staff could return to the field only recently. Failing to comply with the constitutionally mandated count of every person puts at risk the accuracy of data used to determine political representation at all levels and funding for the next decade.

Montana stands willing to do its part to ensure the best count possible.


The governor allocated \$530,500 in CARES Act funding to support 2020 Census promotion and outreach in Montana, five times the original budget our state had to support the decennial count. Other funds also are available to target hard-to-reach populations, including reservation and tribal areas, low-response rural areas, and young adults.

But we need sufficient time to reach all rural households.

Please use your influence to do whatever is necessary to ensure a complete and accurate count of all Montanans and all Americans.

Thank you for considering this important matter.

Sincerely,



Sheila Stearns
Presiding Officer

CC Rep. Greg Gianforte
Sen. Steve Daines