

Michigan launches census committee amid concerns of minority undercount

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Amid concern that minorities could be undercounted, the state of Michigan established a new committee this week to help count all residents in the census next year.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed an executive order creating the 2020 United States Census Complete Count Committee, which will be made up of several diverse groups to reach out to communities across the state. The state plans to spend \$5.5 million for the effort.

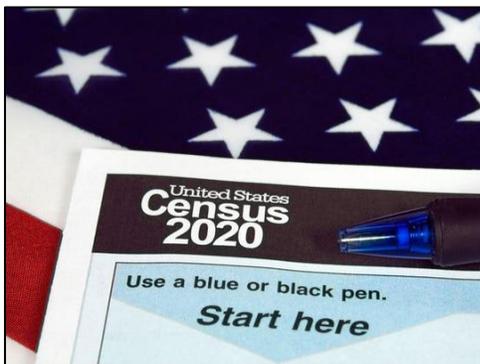
Required under the U.S. Constitution, a census is taken every 10 years to get an accurate count of the nation's population and demographics. The information is used for a wide range of political and funding decisions, including how many seats states will have in the U.S. House of Representatives, funding for K-12 education, nutrition assistance, Head Start and many other programs.

"Census data are used by the federal government to allocate more than \$675 billion in federal funds to states, counties, and communities each year," said [the executive order](#) signed by Whitmer on Tuesday.

The order comes as the Trump administration pushes to include a question on the 2020 census form asking whether the person is a U.S. citizen. This would be the first time since 1950 a question on

citizenship has been asked. Civil rights advocates have said such a move will scare off some respondents, especially those in immigrant communities, and will lead to an undercount. Whitmer said she opposes the citizenship question.

U.S. census 2020 survey. (Photo: Getty Images/iStockphoto)



Also this month, a [report by the Urban Institute](#) says that there could be an undercount of African Americans and Latinos in the 2020 census. In Michigan, there is a high risk of an undercount of 52,700 people, the report said.

Whitmer hopes the new committee will prevent an undercount. Michigan and Detroit have struggled with population growth, and so ensuring everyone is counted is crucial.

"This Committee is essential to making sure that Michigan has the resources and representation it needs," Whitmer said in a statement. "The 2020 census count will dictate how much federal funding is allotted to Michigan for our schools, infrastructure, and how many Representatives we have in the United States House of Representatives. I am establishing a Census Committee so that Michigan will be prepared to organize, educate and count our residents with accuracy."

Michigan has sizable African American and Arab American populations that could be undercounted, say advocates. There is concern among some immigrants from the Middle East that information they give to the census could be used by law enforcement to target them, as was done to Japanese Americans decades ago. Census officials have said they are prevented by law from sharing private census data with other agencies.

Another concern is that the census rejected a request by Arab American groups to have a census category of Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) that could lead to an accurate count and better recognize the community. Arabs are officially classified as "white" by the U.S. government.

Their concerns have been amplified with the Trump administration's increased focus on immigration enforcement and rhetoric toward some minority groups, said advocates.

"It is critically important for all Michiganders to participate in the 2020 Census count and this committee will make sure our residents are informed across all communities throughout the state," Whitmer said. "Our children depend on the federal dollars that come from Census Data and it is our job to make sure we do our best to be counted."

The state's Census Count Committee will consist of members of 63 groups and political offices, including those with Catholic, Muslim, Arab American, and African American organizations, as well as the offices of the Michigan Senate and Michigan House of Representatives.

The committee will be under the state's Department of Technology, Management, and Budget. Whitmer will chair the committee.

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