

Statement of Peter A. Creticos
RE: The Cook County Complete Count Committee to Develop and Implement an Outreach
Strategy for the 2020 Census

October 17, 2018

Good Morning. My name is Peter A. Creticos. I am President of Peter A. Creticos, Ltd. It was in this capacity in 2012 that I was the principal technical advisor on redistricting to the Cook County Board of Commissioners. In fact, I served as the principal technical advisor to the Board in 2001 and in 1993. The 1993 map was the first one that divided the county into 17 single member districts.

I am here to speak in favor of this resolution establishing the Cook County Complete Count Committee to Develop and Implement an Outreach Strategy for the 2020 Census.

Cook County, the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, and many suburban Cook County municipalities rely on a complete and accurate count of the population in order to assure equal representation for every resident at each level of government. But, the consequences for Cook County of an undercount too great to leave it to others to take care of. It is for this reason that I urge the County to establish its own mechanism to bring about a complete and accurate census count.

We know today that marginalized residents are most likely to be undercounted. These include African Americans living in economically disadvantaged and segregated communities, immigrants irrespective of their status, and households with children.

All indicators suggest that this upcoming census will be flawed in several ways. For example, the Census Bureau had resources in 2010 for as many five canvasses to pick up non-respondents. This time, the projected budget allows for only two canvasses. We know that communities that are isolated for any number of factors require extra effort to get them to participate in the census. The loss of face-to-face contacts will adversely affect the response rate and will result in an undercount of that population.

Also, there is substantial evidence that public rhetoric and actions taken against immigrants will have a chilling effect on their participation in the Census regardless of the final outcome of litigation that is challenging the addition of a question on citizenship. Simply put, immigrants, irrespective of their status, are saying that they do not trust the Census with their personal information, and frankly may be suspicious of any government worker at their door.

The Census is also likely to favor those who are already likely to respond. For example, the Bureau will provide an online option for completing the census, which, as a practical matter will skew in favor of households with Internet access and personal computers.

The consequences for this Board and for the next decade can be profound. Based on current Census estimates, we already expect that districts that are majority African American may be

subject to significant changes. Although predominantly immigrant communities may not have experienced population declines, a systematic undercount will ultimately dilute your capacity to establish districts that will afford them the opportunities to elect candidates of their choice. In short, a flawed Census Count may cause unnecessary changes in the composition and design of protected districts under the Voting Rights Act and in the board as a whole.

In addition, this County Board has previously placed high value on maintaining the integrity of communities of shared interests. That becomes much more of a challenge as districts that have undercounted areas will need to be extended to include areas that are not undercounted.

We can all complain that the federal government should do more, but the real consequences will be felt locally, by this Board and in this committee room. The County Board should not depend on others – neither the state, the City of Chicago, nor other municipalities – to leave no person uncouncted. A complete and accurate count is necessary in order to achieve a fair and representative map for the next decade. The proposed Compete Count Committee is an essential step for accomplishing this.