

## Be Counted on April 1 - Census 2010

Written by Wade Henderson, President of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights  
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In about 100 days, on April 1, the 2010 Census – the nationwide head count – begins. It is critical for African Americans, the second largest minority in the nation – and one that has been historically undercounted – to be counted.

The once-in-a-decade census is vital to the health and well-being of African American communities. Why?

Because the census takes a snapshot of the nation's population and with that count, determines how many seats each state gets in the House of Representatives and where district lines are drawn within each state – not to mention the distribution of more than \$400 billion in federal funds to states and localities annually.

These federal funds provide money for schools and roads, for health care for low-income children, for veterans and senior citizens, and for public services that benefit our communities.

At a time when unemployment is at its highest since the 1980s and when the mortgage crisis has undermined African American wealth through hundreds of thousands of home foreclosures, the flow of federal funds coming into our communities is crucial.

You only have to look at the difference in the unemployment rates to see how distressed the African American community is from the rise in joblessness – overall, national unemployment is 10 percent but for African Americans, it's a staggering 15.6 percent.

The situation for African American communities is made worse because state and local governments faced with huge budget deficits are likely to cut funds for programs such as after-school programs, health services and other programs vital to our communities, families, and children.

Equally important, census information is also used to monitor and enforce civil rights and anti-discrimination laws.

That's why African Americans can't afford to be indifferent to the census. In 2000, African Americans were undercounted at the highest rate of any group except Latinos, costing communities hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding.

Many in the African American community didn't participate in the census in the past because they didn't understand why the government was asking for information or they were afraid that the information would be used by credit agencies or landlords.

This fear and concern is natural, but by law, all census data is confidential. No one -- not landlords, not employers, not credit agencies, not law enforcement, not even the president of the United States -- has access to your personal census data.

The Census Bureau has already begun working with organizations in the African American community to help ensure that everyone in our community understands and participates in the 2010 census.

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African Americans need to have an accurate count. Too much is at stake. Taking ten minutes on April 1 to fill out a census form and mail it back is worth it.