



CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

ORDER FOR A HEARING ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CENSUS AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF AN UNDERCOUNT

- WHEREAS,** The United States Census Bureau conducts the federal decennial census as an official count of every person and household, and 2020 Census Redistricting Data released on August 12, 2021 enumerated a population of 675,647 residents in Boston; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Recent reports indicate that the 2020 Census seriously undercounted the number of Hispanic, Black and Native American residents in the U.S.; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The American Community Survey is an ongoing Census Bureau survey providing on a yearly basis vital and more detailed demographic data on jobs and occupations, educational attainment, veteran and disability status, homeowners and renters, language spoken at home, commuting patterns, poverty status, and more; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The Census Bureau also conducts an annual Population Estimates Program between each decennial census, known as intercensal estimates, calculated using a “population base” determined by the results of the last decennial census, which takes into account population change including births, deaths, and migration; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The Census Bureau also conducts annual Housing Unit Estimates, beginning with the results of the last decennial census and factoring in a local government unit’s reported building permits and new residential construction; *and*
- WHEREAS,** There are official processes to challenge results of both the Census Bureau’s decennial census enumeration and intercensal annual population estimates, and the City of Boston has a record of successfully disputing population estimates in court in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2014, with Boston’s official population estimates being revised with increases between 5,000 to over 35,000 residents each time; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The official decennial census enumeration not only determines the population base for future population estimates, but intercensal population estimates are also used to determine the distribution of billions of dollars in state and federal funding, and are used by public officials, planners, policymakers, and researchers to assess past and present conditions to plan for the future; *and*
- WHEREAS,** At the local level, the City of Boston Election Department conducts an Annual Resident Listing, also known as the City’s Annual Census, of all residents 17 years of age or older, which in recent years has been conducted alongside a language and disability survey, and a first-in-the-nation childcare survey, data from which informed the 2019 “Making Childcare Work” report released by the Mayor’s Office of Women’s Advancement and the Economic Mobility Lab; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The federal Census Bureau’s Count Question Resolution Operation (CQR) provides an opportunity for local governmental units to request the review and correction of errors relating to population counts, and is among the final operations by which updates to the Census data can be made; *and*

- WHEREAS,** On January 3, 2022, the Census Bureau began accepting and researching case submissions from local governmental units for the Count Question Resolution Operation, and on January 26, 2022 the Boston City Council adopted Docket #0203, an Order for the City of Boston to submit a Count Question Resolution Operation Case to the United States Census Bureau; *and*
- WHEREAS,** While the CQR Operation will not revise data for the purposes of electoral redistricting, revisions to Census enumeration data will inform future population estimates, assure the accurate distribution of state and federal funds, and provide improved demographic data for the next decade of policy-making; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The Census Bureau is also in the process of initiating a system for governmental units to challenge population counts specifically for group quarters, such as college dormitories and correctional facilities, through a separate program, the 2020 Post-Census Group Quarters Review; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The 2020 Group Quarters Census data reflected 5,000 fewer students than City of Boston data analyzed by the Department of Neighborhood Development, likely due to college students who shifted to study remotely in March 2020; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Analysis conducted by the Research Division of the Boston Planning and Development Agency found that according to the 2020 Census data, “Allston’s population fell by 5.9 percent, with a 40 percent decline in the group quarters population, suggesting that the college dorm population of Allston may not have been correctly counted in the wake of the pandemic evacuation”; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The Group Quarters Population concern is also reflected in the enumeration of the City’s correctional facilities, with the Suffolk County Department of Corrections records showing their two facilities housed approximately 500 additional residents than reported in the 2020 Census redistricting data; *and*
- WHEREAS,** The UMass Donahue Institute’s Population Estimates Program is the official Federal-State Cooperative for Population Estimates (FSCPE) representative for Massachusetts and the formal mechanism by which the Commonwealth submits data updates, corrections, and challenges to the Census Bureau, ensuring that the population estimates and counts produced by the Census Bureau for Massachusetts geographies are as accurate and comprehensive as possible; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Demographic data is an asset of the public good, used to inform complex policy decisions such as service delivery, targeted allocation of public funds and resources, strategic responses to crises, measure success, improve the efficiency of government programs, and due diligence must be paid to ensure its accuracy; ***NOW, THEREFORE BE IT***
- ORDERED:** That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing to discuss the importance of accurate census and demographic data for grant funding and policy making, including ramifications of an undercount, the City’s challenge to the decennial census, and that representatives of the BPDA Research Division, the Elections Department, the Citywide Analytics Team, the Department of Innovation and Technology, the Equity and Inclusion Cabinet, and the UMass Donahue Institute, as well as researchers, demographers, and interested members of the public be invited to attend.