

Florida Housing Coalition's Statewide Affordable Housing Conference

“Equity for housing data: Where the challenges lie”

Orlando, Florida

Director's remarks as prepared for delivery

August 27, 2024

INTRODUCTION

- Good morning, everyone.
- Thank you to the Florida Housing Coalition for inviting me to talk about equity for housing data and valuable new data and tools that support your work and communities.
- It's an honor to be here with you as your director of the U.S. Census Bureau. <<public service>>
- I also want to thank the Bright Community Trust—in particular Frank Wells, Hannah Keen, and Traci Blue—for bringing us together, and for working with my staff to help us better understand your data needs.

<<discuss prev housing research>> Housing discrim studies → struggles of SOI housing

VISION FOR THE CENSUS BUREAU

- SO let's get to my topic for today—talking about housing data and equity
- To begin, here's a little context.
- Our mission is to serve as America's leading provider of quality data about its people, places and economy.
- And as I hope you've noticed, our nation is big . . . it's beautifully diverse . . .
- As a result, the needs of our people and communities vary.
- There are infrastructure needs . . . economic needs . . . there are education and labor needs...
- And all these that vary with neighborhoods, including the cultures and languages of the people that live in these communities, cities, and states . . .
- And these needs are best addressed through an evidence base, one that requires data tailored to each community.
- And yet, there are common threads.
- Y'know, over the past two and a half years, I've traveled the nation, reaching out to just about anyone willing to talk to me.
- And one thing I've realized is how knowledge and insights from data we have available can directly help communities address their needs and improve their lives.
- Mind you, not everyone I've met with understands the value proposition of the vast amounts of publicly available data we have.
- But I promise you, by the time my meeting with them is over, not only do they understand, but they have contact information for our staff who can help them access and use the data.

- Over the course of my community engagements, we've discussed concerns about broadband connectivity, changes in where and how people work, economic development opportunities.
- Of course, we almost always hone-in on the shortage of affordable, quality housing.
- Some issues are important no matter where we live in our country . . . and no matter how big or small our communities are.
- At the Census Bureau, we understand that our data represent valuable assets to help the public and policymakers assess equity and identify underserved communities.
- We need data that better reflect our nation's demographic characteristics such as age, sex, relationship and racial and ethnic groups and geographic levels.
- Such data allow us to capture the local experience, including the rich diversity of our communities and neighbors.
- Combining demographic data with housing characteristics creates great potential for understanding our communities.
- It allows one to promote economic development, address community needs and—yes—mitigate inequities.
- And it does so in ways that are culturally appropriate and relevant to the people who live in their community.
- We're committed to producing data that reflects an accurate portrait of Florida and the rest of the United States.
- To that end, we're constantly assessing how we can improve to better serve and represent underserved groups.

<<example—monthly HH income>>

- We're continuously researching strategies to increase respondent understanding of questions we ask, to reduce the burden of responding, and to improve data accuracy and relevance.
- In all our work, and especially as we prepare for the 2030 Census, an important part of our efforts includes seeking out and listening to diverse voices.
- That certainly includes listening to our partners, which of course includes you.

CHANGING NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

- Now, our nation is constantly changing—evolving—growing . . . right?
- So, let's explore some of those changes using—what else? Our data!
- After all, that's what we do at the Census Bureau.
- Here's a taste from our 2020 Census.
- First and foremost, *our nation is increasingly diverse*.
- The overall racial and ethnic diversity of the country has increased since 2010.
- Now, the Census Bureau has several tools to gauge population diversity—how similar or different we are.
- One is called the *diversity index*.
- Say you take a community or city or a state and pick two people at random from it.
- The diversity index reflects the chance that those two have different races or ethnicities.
- So, the higher the value, the more diverse a community is.
- Well, it turns out that in 2020, Florida was in the top 10 highest diversity index rankings in our nation.
- Florida's diversity index was 64 percent, while the nation's was 61 percent.
- But let's look behind that number.

- Over a quarter—26.5 percent—of Florida’s 2020 population is Hispanic or Latino.
- And about 51 percent of Florida’s population in 2020 was White, non-Hispanic . . . meaning that essentially half of the state’s population is made up of people of color.
- And, our nation’s population is growing, and so it is in this state.
- Between 2010 and 2020, Florida added 2.9 million residents—making it our nation’s 3rd most populous state.
- And for the annual period between July 1st, 2022 and 2023, two of the nation’s 15 fastest growing cities were here in Florida.
- They were Haines City and Leesburg.
- Of course, international migration plays a big role in this state’s population growth.
 - Florida continues to be a leading destination for international migrants, making up 16 percent of the total net international migration to the U.S. between July 1st, 2022, and 2023. By the way, Florida has about 15 percent of the total U.S. population.
 - Also, between July 1, 2022, and 2023, net international migration comprised nearly half of the state’s population increase—about 178,000 people.
- OK, we having fun yet with these numbers?
- Here’s another important change to think about.
- *Our nation is getting older.* The U.S. population in 2020 was older than in 2010 or even 2000.
- In fact, over the last century, the population aged 65 and over grew nearly five times faster than total population did.
- That’s why a lot of policy folks talk about the silver tsunami . . . the growing senior population . . . of which I am one, by the way.
- In 2020, about 1 in 6 people in the United States were aged 65 and over.
- Hey, back in 1920, it was less than 1 in 20. Think about that! Boomers like me are aging.
- So, let’s now talk about national housing.
- Housing in the United States grew by 6.7 percent between 2010 and 2020.
- That’s about half the growth rate of the previous decade.
- But here’s the kicker: the growth was not equal across metropolitan areas—and or even micropolitan areas, for that matter.
- And, as you might expect, that slow growth has impacted housing availability and affordability.
- For example, over half of renters in Florida pay more than 30 percent of their income towards housing costs, compared to under a one-third of homeowners with a mortgage.
- Households that exceeding the 30 percent threshold are ‘experiencing housing cost burden’.
- Additionally, we’ve seen shifts in work patterns because of a rise in remote work and gig work.
 - In 2019, only about 7 percent of workers in Florida worked from home.
 - But in 2021 and 2022, that number jumped to more than 16 percent.
 - That’s in keeping with national trends, by the way.
 - About 15 percent of workers in the United States worked from home in 2022.
- These shifts appear to have been accelerated by the pandemic.
- And that’s been accompanied by shifts in housing and commuting patterns.

MEASUREMENT CHALLENGES

- Now, I happen to think of the diversity and growth of our nation as assets—as strengths.
- And yet, they can pose challenges for us as a statistical agency who’s tasked with collecting data from all our nation’s people.

- For example, over 30 percent of Floridians speak a language other than English at home.
- Many of our respondents may have issues of language and comprehension, which in turn can lead to poorer measurement.
- This creates a situation where the people we need to know about the most, are those who are measured the least accurately, relatively speaking.
- That's a data equity issue, of course.
- Now, housing changes can also pose challenges.
- Multigenerational households and multifamily households residing in a single housing unit are harder to identify and enumerate.
- We are also historically challenged by "hidden" housing units, such as accessory or informal dwellings in cities, and other nontraditional housing such as we find in *colonias* along the border.

<< example—Edinburg TX Colonias visit>>

- Our housing enumeration challenges transcend even these situations.
- There are some parts of our nation—for example, rural areas, and large portions of Puerto Rico—where communities simply lack "city-style" addresses.
- We find it difficult to count and navigating to houses in rural areas when addresses are nonexistent or, when they do exist for mailing purposes, are not recognizable by most mapping and navigation applications.
 - Descriptions like "white house, blue shutters" or "the Smith homestead" might tell us what the house looks like or who owned it, but not where it's located.
 - And housing units on tribal lands are similarly challenging.
 - We're working on ways to better identify hidden and difficult housing, so that our census and survey takers can deliver questionnaires and conduct survey interviews.

PREPARATION FOR 2030/HUP RESEARCH

- In the midst of these challenges, we're diligently preparing for the 2030 Census.
- The Census Bureau is focusing heavily on research to improve enumeration of hard-to-count and historically undercounted households and populations.
- We're conducting research on public trust, cultural relevance, language usage, question comprehension and many other topics to develop better methods to reach and collect data from the hard to count population.
- Many other areas of research that may not appear on the surface to be about historically undercounted populations also intersect heavily with these populations.
- Consider research on our field operations, on improving efficiency of enumerators using adaptive design, on leveraging administrative records to predict housing unit occupancy, on improving our frame of housing units.
- All such research interacts with and ultimately impacts the enumeration of historically undercounted people and their households.
- In fact, using this lens, it's easy to see that much of the research to improve the 2030 Census directly or indirectly involves the enumeration of historically undercounted populations.
- So, it should come as no surprise that we have an interwoven research agenda to address the enumeration of historically undercounted populations.
- In our journey toward our next Census, we're conducting over 50 projects in five enhancement areas.
- You can read about all of them in our 2030 Census Research Explorer tool at <census.gov/2030census>, by the way.

- Several projects primarily focus on reaching, motivating and accurately counting historically undercounted populations.
- Much of this research intersects with these topics even if the titles of the research do not include the term “historically undercounted population.”
- In fact, 22 (or 40 percent) of our research projects are investigating how to increase participation of historically undercounted populations.
- Another nine (16 percent) projects probe how to improve external engagement, which necessarily includes research to engage historically undercounted populations.
- That means over half of our projects involve research that addresses our ability to effectively enumerate these critically important populations.
- Our efforts in this arena cover a wide range of topics. Among them:
 - Conducting research to inform our overall 2030 Census communications campaign and developing outreach strategies for historically undercounted populations.
 - Exploring the use of administrative records to investigate the undercount of young children, one of the most persistently undercounted groups.
 - Creating tailored contact strategies—that is, developing culturally relevant messaging, materials and methods to encourage self-response, which is critical to the quality of census data.
 - Developing an internet self-response instrument specifically for certain types of non-institutional group quarters, such as college student housing and military barracks.
- Additionally, we received a lot of public feedback suggesting that we include training our census staff to engage with culturally diverse respondent communities.
- In response, we’re developing staff training that builds specialized skills on cultural competencies.
- Our priority is to improve how we collect and present information on historically undercounted and hard-to-count populations.
- We’re taking a single enterprise approach across the Census Bureau—both within and outside of the 2030 Census research program—on the collection and reporting of data on these populations.
- For example, we also have experts throughout the agency working together on topics like the undercount of young children.
- And we’re seeking to innovate the way we geolocate residential addresses in rural and remote locations in the United States.

COMMUNITY OF THE WHOLE EFFORT

- As we prepare for 2030, much research, testing and learning lie ahead.
- We’ll continue to communicate with you about our preparations, progress, challenges and successes.
- Why? Because we live our values of transparency and scientific integrity.
- And we need you to be our active partners as we forge a new vision of how decennial censuses (and ongoing surveys, for that matter) can and should be conducted.
- We recognize the need to engage and collaborate with partners, stakeholders, tribes, and the public.
- Their perspectives—your perspectives—are critical to informing our research.
- In my role as director of the Census Bureau, I seek closer connections but with Census Bureau partners, stakeholders and the public more generally.
- We need to understand the rich, diverse needs of communities from urban and suburban neighborhoods as well as rural counties, farms, and ranches and even tribal lands.

- Hey, that's why I'm here in Florida this week: to hear from elected officials, community organizations, businesses, advocates and other groups about what their data needs are, and how census data can help them.
- As we endeavor to develop a superb 2030 Census, we ask that you stay engaged with us and with each other.
- We're all in this together.
- Our efforts and our nation are stronger when we work together toward the common goal of a complete and accurate census.

CONCLUSION

- Both Florida and the Census Bureau are facing challenges in the coming years and decades.
- But you know, I've always seen challenges and even obstacles as fodder for opportunity.
- You just have to think about them differently . . . to see the opportunity that others don't see.
- That's why I believe great things lie ahead for rural communities in Florida and throughout our nation.
- By tapping our creativity, our passion for helping each other, I believe we will thrive like never before . . . and so will our residents.
- And these challenges are best addressed from a foundation of knowledge, from an evidence base.
- Data driven insights allow informed decision making, which in turn can enhance urban and economic planning.
- Just know that the Census Bureau is here to help with a bounty of data for your informed decision-making and planning.
- Thank you so much for the honor of addressing you. I look forward to your questions.