TALKING POINTS: Census Citizenship Question

On the evening of March 26, 2018, Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross announced that he had directed the Census Bureau to add an untested and unnecessary question to the 2020 Census form, which would ask the citizenship status of every person in America. The following talking points are designed to help you communicate why this was a bad decision and why it must be corrected.

# This alarming decision is bad for the census, bad for our communities, and bad for America.

* + Conducting a census with major untested elements will force the Census Bureau to conduct the count with a blindfold on. The Census Bureau conducted careful, costly research and testing over the last eight years to develop the census questions. The addition of this new and controversial question invalidates that research and risks jeopardizing the success of the count.
  + The unwise addition of this citizenship question to the form will cause participation in the upcoming census to plummet. Asking every household and every person in the country about their citizenship status in the current political environment – when there is no programmatic basis or need to do so – will cause panic and will cause hundreds of thousands of people in our communities to avoid the census for fear of being targeted by this administration.
  + This question is unnecessarily intrusive and will raise concerns in all households –native- and foreign-born, citizen and non-citizen – about the confidentiality of their personal information and how government authorities may use that information.

# Getting the 2020 Census right is important for all American communities – particularly those most likely to be undercounted. This politically driven citizenship question compromises the Census Bureau’s constitutional responsibility to conduct a fair and accurate count of every person living in the United States.

* + Everyone relies on census data. Census data are the basis for fair political representation. Local community leaders use this data to make decisions about allocating resources for community needs like education, assistance for veterans, hospitals, and transportation. Businesses and entrepreneurs use census data to make critical decisions about where to locate plants and stores, hiring, and customer needs.
  + The Justice Department released thousands of documents in response to the multi-state lawsuit led by the NY AG’s office. These included internal Census Bureau documents warning that the addition of a citizenship question would depress census response rates, drive up costs, and diminish the accuracy of census data. The documents also included a paper trail that demonstrated that the question was added to further the agenda of political operatives like Steve Bannon and Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach. Secretary Ross later filed a memo revealing that he had considered adding the question as early as February 2017, when he began his job, after hearing from other senior administration officials.
  + The costs of adding an untested question this late in the process to taxpayers is significant. According to the Census Bureau, every one percent decrease in the self-response rate will increase the cost of the count by $55 million. A five percent drop in self response would add an additional, unplanned $275 million to the census.