



Politics & Government

2020 Census: \$1B In Fed Funding At Stake For Contra Costa County

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By California News Wire Services, News Partner | Dec 19, 2018 7:30 am ET | Updated Dec 19, 2018 10:30 am ET



CONTRA COSTA COUNTY, CA — The Decennial Census is looming in April 2020, and a new question about citizenship is fueling concerns that Contra Costa County could lose out on federal funding over the following decade if hard-to-count populations like undocumented immigrants are left out.

Renters, young children, adults ages 18 to 24 and people who move more than once in a year are also difficult to count for the purposes of the census, according to county staff who presented a report on the issue at Tuesday's Board of Supervisors meeting in Martinez.

Each person that gets left off of the final tally will cost the county an estimated \$2,000 annually in federal funding. If the final tally is off by 5 percent, staff estimates it will cost the county \$1.1 billion over 10 years.

If immigrants decline to participate in the census, it won't just impact funding. The number of congressional seats apportioned to California could also change. There are concerns, however, that the information immigrants submit to the census could be used against them.

The citizenship question has been challenged in a lawsuit filed by California's attorney general, but that matter is expected to go to trial next year and has not yet been resolved.

At this time, however, respondents who choose not to answer the question are still entitled to be counted, according to a partnership specialist from the U.S. Census Bureau who was on hand for Tuesday morning's meeting. However, those who choose not to answer all questions on the form may be targeted for a follow-up visit from census workers.

In an effort to ensure that every resident of Contra Costa County is included in the census count, the board is organizing an outreach plan using \$362,605 in funding from the state. Still, however, Supervisor John Gioia suspects more money will be needed.

"Clearly we need to put in more than \$362,000," Gioia said.

"This is important, this is significant," he added. "We need to invest."

During public comment, representatives from Planned Parenthood of Northern California and the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano County indicated that an undercount on local census data could adversely affect their funding, and their capacity to provide services for local residents who depend on them for food or health care.

In the end, the board unanimously approved a motion to assemble a steering committee for outreach to ensure strong participation in the 2020 census.

It is expected to include "census Saturdays and Sundays," in which county staff will work with faith communities to encourage participation among those congregations, and an adopt-a-block program in which area residents will contact their neighbors.

They're also considering a youth film festival to encourage census participation, as well as other events like soccer tournaments, which county staff said have been effective in other counties.

Gioia also called on cities within Contra Costa County that have large hard-to-count populations to join the effort, calling it a shared responsibility.

By Bay City News Service

Photo courtesy U.S. Census Bureau