



Chairman Hoops, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about how important it is to “get out the count” in our 2020 Census from a faith-based perspective.

My name is Michael Harlow and I’m representing Shepherding the Next Generation here today. It’s an organization of pastors and ministry leaders who advocate for policies and practices that strengthen families and communities. A lot of what we do concerns matters of faith - and matters of the heart if you will. But our advocacy is also driven by the desire to see resources used effectively. That’s why you’ll hear us talking frequently about “research-based” approaches and about the wise conservation of resources that make smart use of taxpayer dollars.

That’s the basis for what I have to say today. Members of Shepherding know parents are children’s first teachers. We know churches and civic organizations can and do wonderful and critical things to feed the hungry, shelter the destitute, and help people get the medical care they need to be healthy and often to stay alive. But the fact is, churches and civic organizations can’t do it all.

The less fortunate among us need hope but they also need public education resources to ensure their schools give them a fighting chance for a good education . . . they need resources like the supplemental nutrition assistance program to make the few dollars they have go a little farther toward feeding their kids. Those kids need healthy and affordable school lunches so they’ve got the brain power to learn. They also need medical care so they grow up healthy and *able* to learn.

I expect everyone here today knows that the programs that make all this possible are funded based on data we get from the Census. The same goes for our police, fire and EMS, our parks and other entities that require public investment for the public good. That’s why it’s so important for pastors, ministry leaders, employers, policymakers and others to encourage people to *participate* in the census . . .

Because unless they do, the people who hold the purse strings to the resources we need here in Ohio and around the country won't release the funding we deserve for these programs.

And at the risk of sounding cold - how can you blame them? They're going to base their decisions on the information they have. If they're responsible they're going to direct taxpayer money toward the communities that need these programs the most. It's *our* responsibility to let them know we have enough children and families who depend on these resources in order to become independent and productive members of society. We can't say "shame on them" if we don't give them the information they need for these decisions.

Finally, there's a strong Biblical basis for the census. In the Old Testament, we're told that God instructed Moses to take a census of the people and that in the New Testament a census brought Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. We also know from Matthew that it's part of our civic duty to support children in poor and under-resourced communities, which is exactly what we're doing when we work for an accurate census that will deliver resources to these communities. An inaccurate census resulting from low participation will do more than shortchange these important programs. It will make it difficult to direct taxpayer money where it's needed most. This includes rural areas where people haven't been accurately counted in the past.

More accurate data will also help churches and Christian organizations make better decisions about where to locate our faith-based ministries and services. For these reasons and more, while we count on faith leaders to encourage their congregations to complete their census forms to ensure their own flock is correctly counted, we need to ensure there is adequate funding for the Census and we encourage the legislature to provide funds supporting these on-the-ground efforts to ensure an accurate Census which benefits all of us.

Thank you.