



NEWS MEDIA
ALLIANCE

March 19, 2020

Dr. Steven Dillingham
Director
U. S. Census Bureau
4600 Silver Hill Road
Washington, DC 20233

Dear Dr. Dillingham:

The Decennial Census is one of the most important Constitutional functions of the federal government. Having an accurate count of the number of residents and households in the United States is vitally important for the functioning and financing of our democracy.

Recent developments, however, have made this undertaking more difficult to operationalize. As your March 18 statement suspending Census field operations for two weeks demonstrates, the unprecedented and tragic spread of the COVID-19 Coronavirus places considerable stress on everyone, individuals and businesses alike, including the hardworking Census Bureau employees and census takers. We commend you for this decisive action to protect the health and safety of your employees and the American public at large.

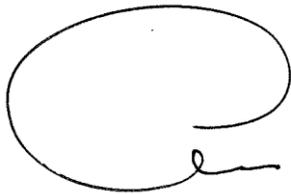
As you note in your statement, the American public is “strongly encouraged” to fill out the Census online during this time. Getting the word out about the online response option and the fact that the Census continues regardless of the pandemic is now more important than ever, especially in the unfortunate event that these exceptional circumstances extend further down the road. News publishers can play a vital role in assisting this effort.

The News Media Alliance represents more than 2,000 news media organizations in the United States and around the world. Our members range from large national news organizations to small local newspapers, all serving their communities by providing them with vital and trustworthy news and information. The consumption of online news media has increased considerably in the past few weeks, as the public’s demand for high quality information has increased. As an example, according to Parse.ly, online pageviews on March 12 were 44 percent higher than the week before, while Comscore indicated that the week of March 9-15 had more than 100 million more news visits than the second busiest week for news consumption – an increase considerably higher than that witnessed by most local television stations according to Comscore. These numbers make it clear that there is an increased demand for reliable news content and that the Census Bureau could reach a considerable section of the population by increasing its footprint on these sites and print newspapers.

Your 2020 Census Paid Media Campaign plan from December 2019 shows that you are already planning to spend 8.1 percent of your \$240 million paid media budget on newspaper advertising and 29.1% on digital media, assumedly including online news sites. We believe that dedicating more funds to these vital media channels during this time of uncertainty when the public is staying at home and consuming more information would be beneficial for the accuracy of the Census in addition to supporting local institutions that the public relies on. In addition to reallocating any potential advertising contingency funds you may have, it may also be appropriate to request more funding for Census advertising purposes from Congress as it considers measures to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the society.

On behalf of the News Media Alliance, I want to again commend you for your work during this critical time. News organizations reach millions of Americans every week and can play a major role in ensuring that the negative effects of the crisis on the response rate and accuracy of the Census are minimized. I would be happy to discuss this with you in more detail at a time convenient for you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Chavern', with a large, stylized initial 'D'.

David Chavern
President & CEO
News Media Alliance