

# THE BLADE

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## To the editor: Accurate census provides protection for children, families

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BY COREY BOYTE

Despite widespread support for high-quality preschool, Ohio's childhood advocates have grown accustomed to explaining the need for increased funding to expand enrollment, particularly for children in under-resourced communities. Yet there's a potential setback around the bend: an underfunded 2020 Census that could lead to reduced resources for important education and child care programs for years to come.

The constitution requires a census every 10 years to count the people in the U.S. This information helps lawmakers determine where to allocate funds for education, health care, infrastructure, and other investments to advance the public good.

Unfortunately, there is a growing concern that we may not be prepared to implement the 2020 Census effectively. Spurred by many factors, including the fact that about 1 million young children were undercounted in 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau wants to use new technology to keep costs down and produce a more accurate count. However, much of this technology has yet to be fully tested. While it should work, there's no guarantee it will.

The good news is that Congress included more money in its Fiscal Year 2018 spending bill to enable the Census Bureau to improve accuracy. That's important because at one point funding was \$3 billion short of what was needed.

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The danger lies in what happens to Fiscal Year 2019 spending. Many needs will compete for lawmakers' attention, jeopardizing census funding in the final months before implementation.

Several sectors of society have already weighed in on this issue, including business people, who depend on accurate census data to determine where to set up shop. Those of us in the Christian community believe it's part of our civic duty (Matthew 25:40) to support children in poor or otherwise under-resourced communities. That's why I want to ensure more resources for Head Start and Early Head Start programs, which provide safe and nurturing environments where children can learn and grow.

These children also need support to stay physically healthy. That's happening thanks to children's health insurance and help from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Working parents also need to know their children are being well nurtured in their absence, which is why they depend on the Child Care and Development Block Grant program.

An inaccurate census will do more than shortchange these important programs. It will make it difficult to direct taxpayer money where it's needed most.

In the Old Testament, we're told that God instructed Moses to take a census of the people and in the New Testament, a census brought Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. These Biblical roots inspire me to recognize the contemporary need for a census that fulfills its promise as a tool for supporting vulnerable children and families.

As a leader of a multi-ethnic and economically diverse congregation, I'm especially concerned that Latino and African-American children are already among the most undercounted populations in the U.S. Census. The challenges they face will be exacerbated if Congress does not provide the needed tools and allocate resources for an accurate count in 2020.

Fortunately, a recent report from Shepherding the Next Generation, an organization of pastors and ministry leaders, spotlights a number of good things that will happen if the census is carried out effectively. The Census Bureau will be able to target a larger field presence to "get out the count" in rural areas where a lot of people haven't been counted in the past, for example. More accurate data will also help churches and Christian organizations make better decisions about where to locate our faith-based ministries and services.

While we must count on Congress to fund the 2020 Census well enough to ensure its accuracy, we can't depend on the government alone to fix this problem. Faith leaders must also encourage congregations to complete their census forms to ensure their own flock is counted. That's easily within our power and an effective use of our voices as advocates for stronger families and communities nationwide.

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