



Massachusetts lags in Census participation

Wicked Local Somerville

Posted Mar 26, 2010 @ 03:30 PM

Somerville — Just two weeks into Census 2010, Massachusetts response rates are trailing other parts of the nation, with local participation rates in Greater Boston as low as 5 percent — putting federal funding and congressional representation at risk.

According to the most recent federal Census participation data, only 26 percent of Massachusetts residents have returned their 10-question Census form, which was mailed to every household in the commonwealth in March.

While some communities, such as Needham, Stoneham and Sharon, are boasting response rates of nearly 40 percent, some places, including parts of Jamaica Plain, Roxbury, Dorchester, Chelsea and others, are showing return rates of less than 7 percent.

“The stakes are really high here. A poor showing on the Census directly contributes to Massachusetts losing federal funding and could potentially mean the loss of an entire congressional seat in Washington,” said Holly St. Clair, director of data services for the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) in Boston, which is working to increase participation and ensure a complete count in the 2010 Census. “The form has just 10 questions and takes less than 10 minutes to fill out. Your privacy is completely protected under federal law, and by responding promptly, you’re directly helping your local community to get the resources it needs for the next decade.”

The national response rate stands at 20 percent, putting Massachusetts ahead of the average but behind states like Montana, South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin and Missouri, all of which have average participation rates of 31 percent or higher. Seven of the top 10 responding cities are in Iowa, including Leighton City, Iowa, which leads the nation with a response rate of 75 percent. In the 2000 Census, the national mail-back response rate was 72 percent.

If Census forms are not returned by April 19, the federal government will send in-person Census collectors to every uncounted residence. Door-to-door Census collection takes time and money; if 100 percent of households mailed back their forms, taxpayers would save \$1.5 billion, according to the Census.

“It actually protects your privacy more to mail in your response than to have someone come to your door,” said St. Clair. “It also costs the government more, about \$56 per form, to collect Census data in person instead of by mail. So by sending back your form, you’re saving the country billions in taxpayer dollars.”

Boston’s Asian Community Development Corporation (ACDC) is working to dispel fears about Census collection. Massachusetts has among the top 10 largest Asian populations in the nation, yet Asians are frequently undercounted in Massachusetts because of language isolation and poor understanding of the Census.

“People are concerned about strangers walking up to their doors and asking for information,” said Frank Yu, project leader at the ACDC, which is working with the local Asian youth group, “A-VOYCE,” to post flyers and talk to Asians about the Census, particularly in Malden, Quincy and Chinatown.

“The youth really get how important it is to be counted and they are committed to getting that message out,” said Yu, who said the ACDC is working to meet people when they are out in public spaces such as the Chinatown Gate Park, H-Mart in Burlington or at MBTA stations — not by knocking on doors.

This weekend, clergy around the state will take to their pulpits to promote the Census as part of an effort by MassVOTE to reach hard-to-count populations through their faith communities. Pastors across the state have agreed to mention the Census during their services this weekend on “Census Sunday,” which hopes to educate every Massachusetts resident on the importance of returning their Census forms. For information on “Census Sunday,” visit www.massVOTE.org.

For more information on the Census and how you can increase participation rates where you live, visit www.mapc.org. For more information about A-VOYCE or ACDC, visit www.asiancdc.org.

Copyright 2010 Somerville Journal. Some rights reserved

Comments (0)

Login or register to post a comment:

Login

Username:

Password:

Forgot password

Register

Email:

First Name:

Last Name:

I agree to the terms of use

I am over 13 years of age

NOTE: Your inbox must accept emails from "no-reply@gatehousemedia.com"

[Contact us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) |

Somerville Journal | 20-40 Holland Street, Somerville, Massachusetts 02144 02144

Copyright © 2006–2010 GateHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a Creative Commons license, except where noted.

SEO by eLocalListing | Advertiser profiles | Cherrp Local | Somerville Real estate | Find your Wicked Local Town