Dear Ms. Jessup:

Decennial census data are the primary source of information used to monitor community change and address local needs. The accuracy of these data is essential to decisions made by businesses, non-profit agencies, schools and a host of organizations and government entities.

As such, [ORGANIZATION] urges the Commerce Department to express opposition to the inclusion of a citizenship question on the 2020 Census form due to the negative effect if will have on the quality of data that results. We are mindful that the inaccurate data will cloud decisions made for the next 10 years.

We oppose the citizenship question because it is not necessary for the proper performance of Census Bureau functions. Currently, this type of information is collected through the American Community Survey (ACS). Given that the ACS is administered more frequently than the census, anyone interested in citizenship data could capture such data in a timelier fashion through the ACS.

The burden of the citizenship question is considerable and undermines efforts by the Census Bureau to conduct a more timely, cost-effective census. Researcher scientists can tell you that the addition of any question increases the time and cost of any survey. However, the citizenship question is even more likely to increase the amount of time and cost of the census. Because individuals who have non-citizens living in their household or who are non-citizens themselves will be reluctant to respond to the census due to recent negative immigrant discourse, census canvassing staff will be required to make more home contacts, inflating the amount it costs to garner responses from each household. The increase in cost for each response is the direct opposite of what the Census Bureau planned and hoped to achieve in 2020.

Quality of the census data will also be compromised if a citizenship question is added. Based on the experience of other surveys, population scientists have observed that responses to citizenship questions tend to be of low quality. This reality is compounded by considerable debate on whether individuals will leave the question blank or provide false information.

A complete and accurate census is critical for each community in our nation. The quality of the data collected will shape decisions made for the 10 years following the census. For the reasons outlined above, [ORGANIZATION] strongly opposes the addition of a citizenship question on the 2020 Census form.

Sincerely,