

RESOLUTION

Resolution No. 21-32

PATRON: Robert W. Lazaro
Executive Director

DATE: May 27, 2021

2020 Census Differential Policy

WHEREAS, Northern Virginia Regional Commission's Demographer is leading a regionwide effort on 2020 Census Concerns of the Northern Virginia Demographers Network representing Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William counties, the City of Alexandria, the City of Fairfax; and

WHEREAS, the Census Bureau will deploy a new statistical disclosure avoidance system for the 2020 Census known as "differential privacy". This new approach is meant to precisely control the amount of randomness or data noise that will be added to the 2020 Census data to protect privacy. The Census Bureau's mission is to serve as the nation's leading provider of quality data about its people and economy; and

WHEREAS, given the nature of tradeoff between data privacy and data accuracy, balancing these requires deliberate decisions supported by the data users; and

WHEREAS, the region's Demographers have significant concerns about the availability and accuracy of the 2020 Census data; and

WHEREAS, on April 28, 2021, the Census Bureau released new versions of the 2010 Census data tables demonstrating the proposed disclosure avoidance procedure for 2020 redistricting data. Disclosure avoidance procedures for other 2020 Census data products will be available at a later date. This latest version incorporated extensive feedback from data users nationwide that improved the system's data outputs and it adjusted the level of accuracy versus privacy, technically known as the privacy-loss budget, by increasing accuracy. Upon evaluation by the Northern Virginia Demographers Network, the April 2021 demonstration products compared to the October 2019 show much improved jurisdiction level population and race data to the point that it is accurate enough to be usable by local jurisdictions for local policy, planning, and analysis. Evaluation of small areas within jurisdictions shows substantial discrepancies in the 2010 population and race demographics when compared to the original 2010 Census published data, particularly at the census block level; and

WHEREAS, the Census Bureau has stated that non-redistricting 2020 Census data will be less accurate than the redistricting data; and

WHEREAS, less accurate and less available data for areas within jurisdictions will have long lasting, negative impacts on the usability of census data for local and regional government planning, program efforts, and

redistricting. As it stands today, the demographics that are produced from the proposed method and privacy versus accuracy balance for the majority of census blocks, for some block groups, and for some tracts are deemed too unreliable to be usable in most planning and policy making efforts of local governments;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Northern Virginia Regional Commission authorizes the Chair of the commission to voice the region's concerns and raise awareness about the upcoming changes to decennial census data through communication with the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, state legislators, and U.S. legislators representing the Commonwealth of Virginia; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Chair of the commission recommend to the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, state legislators and U.S. legislators representing the Commonwealth of Virginia, that an official request be made by the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia and legislators to the U.S. Census Bureau to express concerns about the proposed differential privacy method. Recommend that the Commonwealth make an official request immediately with the understanding that the Census Bureau plans to adopt the final differential privacy methodology for redistricting in early June. Recommend that the Commonwealth request the following:

1. To not adopt the proposed methodology released in April 2021.
2. To significantly improve the accuracy of the data above what was proposed in the April 2021 product, so as to provide usable and reliable data at the census block, block group, and tract level that local governments need.
3. To provide local and regional governments the same sets of data that were available in 2010 Census, at the same geographic level, and indicate a measure of noise infused.



CERTIFICATION

The undersigned certifies that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of a resolution adopted at a legally convened meeting of the Northern Virginia Regional Commission on May 27, 2021.



ROBERT W. LAZARO, JR., CERTIFYING OFFICER