



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
OVERSIGHT & GOVERNMENT REFORM

CHAIRMAN EDOLPHUS TOWNS

OPENING STATEMENT

BROOKLYN FIELD HEARING

**“IS BROOKLYN BEING COUNTED?
PROBLEMS WITH THE 2010 CENSUS”**

JULY 19, 2010

Good morning and thank you for being here.

Today we will examine an incident that occurred on June 12 and June 13, 2010 which resulted in whistleblower allegations that two former managers at the Brooklyn North East local census office ordered census forms to be completed fraudulently using information from an on-line data source instead of personal interviews.

We want to understand what happened, how much damage was done, and what is being done to ensure the accuracy of the Brooklyn census counts. I want each and every resident of Brooklyn to know how important I think it is for them to be counted in this census.

This Committee has made the 2010 Census a top priority, and I don't have to tell you how troubled I am about this incident. Anything that compromises the integrity of the 2010 Census is unacceptable—there's too much at stake here. We must do everything we can to make sure the final count is accurate and complete.

As a co-sponsor of the Whistleblower Protection and Enhancement Act, I am gratified to know that the problems in the Brooklyn North East census office came to light because of whistleblower complaints. These complaints initiated an investigation by the Census Bureau headquarters and the New York Regional Census Center which resulted in the swift termination of the two people who were responsible. In addition, the Census Bureau immediately ordered the recount of 10,000 households in the affected neighborhoods of Williamsburg, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Bushwick, and Greenpoint.

Another fact stands out here, and I want to make a point about it. I'm concerned that a couple of bad apples may have undermined the public's faith in the census.

However, instead of dwelling on the wrongdoers, I think people should focus on the actions of those who did the **right** thing. The night shift supervisor who refused to carry out illegal instructions and who resigned in protest – that took a lot of courage and I think the Census Bureau should appropriately recognize the courage and integrity that was demonstrated by one of its employees.

Moreover, the Census Bureau acted quickly and decisively to investigate and fire the wrongdoers, and reinstate the supervisor who resigned in protest rather than engage in fraudulent activity. In other words, the system worked the way it was supposed to when a problem arose.

An accurate census is essential to ensure integrity in redrawing Congressional districts and for apportionment of members of the House of Representatives. In addition, billions of dollars in federal, state, and local funds are

distributed based on the Census Bureau's reports on our nation's population. The census helps policymakers better understand where vital services are needed most.

I represent a district that is comprised of a number of so-called "hard to count" communities: senior citizens, recent immigrants, undocumented workers, and people who don't trust a stranger knocking at their door. This also includes communities in the district of my friend and colleague, Congresswoman Yvette Clarke, who has joined us here today.

These communities present challenges to the Census Bureau, but these challenges must be met.

In that regard, I want to welcome Dr. Groves, the Director of the Census Bureau. Dr. Groves, I know that coming all the way to Brooklyn for this hearing was not a convenient thing for you to do. I think the fact that you are here demonstrates your commitment to rooting out problems and making sure the census is as accurate as possible. And I appreciate your being here today.

With so many in our communities in need of help, we need to get this right. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, who will tell us how they have responded to this incident and what they are doing to make sure we have an accurate and complete count of Brooklyn residents. Once again, I want to let the Census Bureau know that we in Congress are eager to do our part to make sure that happens.

Thank you.