

AAP lauds Supreme Court decision barring census citizenship question

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The AAP is applauding a U.S. Supreme Court ruling temporarily barring the 2020 census from including a question on citizenship and is calling on the Department of Commerce not to continue to pursue it.

“Including a citizenship question in the 2020 Census would have wide-reaching, detrimental consequences for hard-to-count communities like young children, people of color, immigrant families, urban and low-income households, and limited-English proficient populations,” AAP President Kyle E. Yasuda, M.D., FAAP, said in a [statement](#).

The Commerce Department said it wanted a citizenship question on the census to help enforce the Voting Rights Act, but Supreme Court justices called the rationale “contrived.” They are giving the department an opportunity to provide more explanation.

Census data are used to distribute more than \$675 billion in federal funds for programs that include the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program, the National School Lunch Program and Head Start. These programs are crucial for the nearly one in five children who lives in poverty.

In the 2010 census, nearly 1 million children under the age of 5 are estimated to have gone uncounted, jeopardizing funding for these programs in the areas where they live. If the government asks about citizenship status in 2020, experts say undocumented or mixed families may not respond out of fear of deportation, leaving many more vulnerable children uncounted. About one in four children lives in an immigrant family, though most of these children are U.S. citizens.

“Immigrant families are already facing threats to their health and safety, including being denied benefits, housing and access to food and medical care,” Dr. Yasuda said. “... Adding a citizenship question to the census would mean that these children and everyone they live with would be less likely to be counted, and that their communities would have significantly fewer resources to serve them.”

It is unclear whether there would be time to include the citizenship question in 2020 even if courts ultimately approve. The AAP is calling on the Commerce Department to stop pursuing inclusion of the question.

Regardless of whether the question ultimately appears, pediatricians have an important role to play in relaying the message that children of all ages need to be counted, according to Judy Aschner, M.D., FAAP, chair of the Federation of Pediatric Organizations (FOPO) and chair of pediatrics and physician-in-chief of the Joseph M. Sanzari Children's Hospital at Hackensack Meridian Health.

"It is essential that families, particularly those with young children, understand how critically important it is to their communities and to their families that they complete the census survey for everyone in their household, even newborn babies," she said. "The federal government allocates hundreds of billions of dollars that support things that are important to them, including health care, education and nutrition programs, based on accurate census data. If children are not counted, those dollars will not go to their state, their city or their neighborhood."

FOPO and its partners will be developing toolkits pediatricians can use to help families understand why it is important to count all kids and to assist families in completing the census survey.