Written Statement Of Deborah Weinstein

Executive Director of the Coalition on Human Needs

To the Massachusetts Senate Committee on the Census

Hearing On Patterns of Over- and Undercount in the Census

December 8, 2025

The Coalition on Human Needs submits this written testimony for the Massachusetts Senate Committee on the Census in connection with its hearing regarding patterns of over- and undercount in the Census.

The Coalition on Human Needs (CHN) is an alliance of national organizations working together to promote public policies which address the needs of low-income and other vulnerable populations. The Coalition's members include civil rights, religious, labor, and professional organizations, service providers, and those concerned with the wellbeing of children, women, the elderly, and people with disabilities. The Coalition on Human Needs monitors and tracks data on human needs in the United States, including data on poverty, income, unemployment, measures of

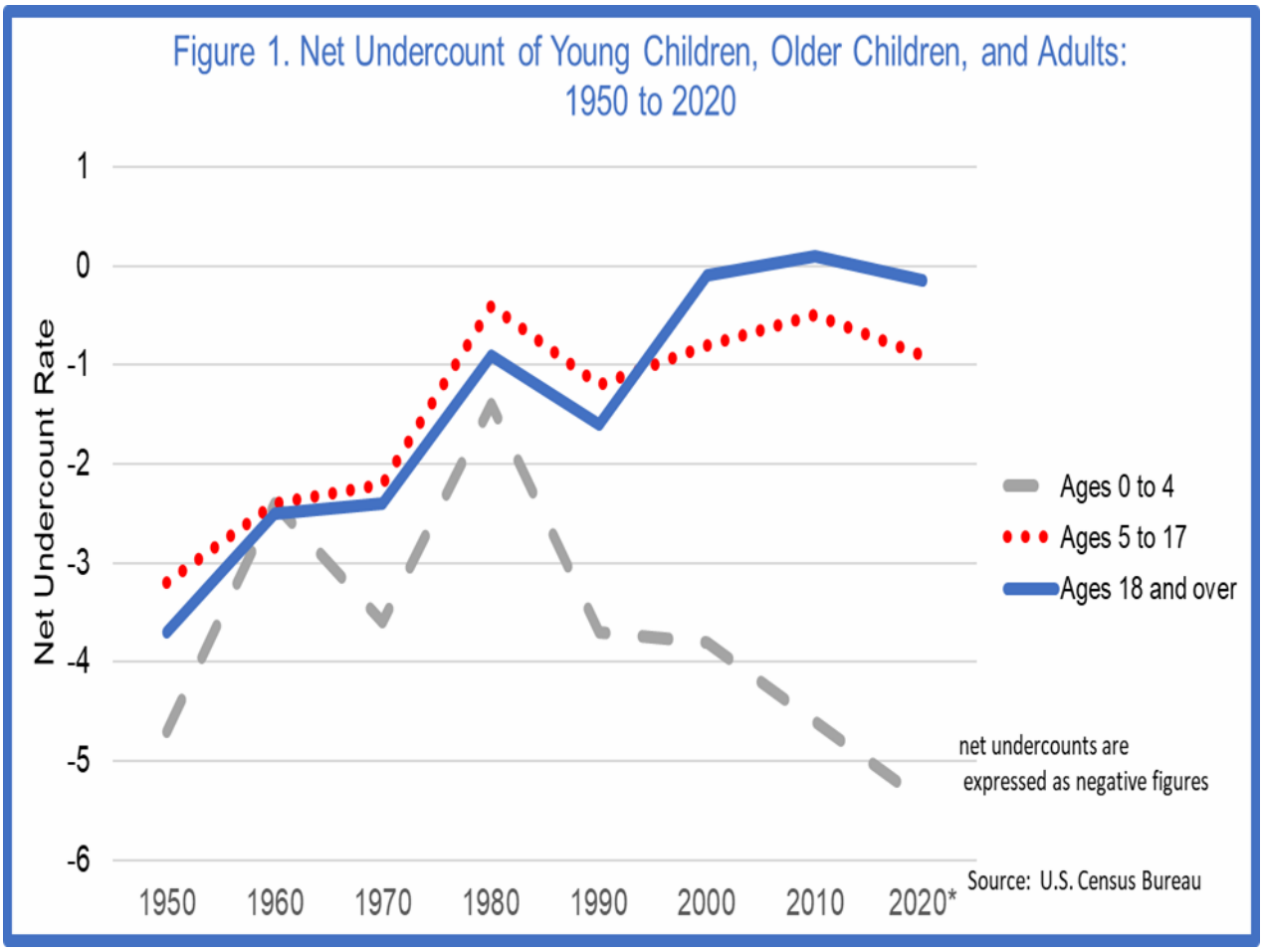
inflation, access to benefits, and other findings that relate to policies that reduce poverty and hardship. The Coalition is one of the members of the steering committee for Count All Kids, a campaign to improve the count of young children in the decennial census and other Census Bureau products. The Count All Kids Committee is a joint effort among organizations that are interested in engaging in educational and advocacy efforts to improve data that the Census Bureau provides on children and their families – especially young children. The committee collaborates with the Census Bureau's Young Children Working Group and coordinates the Count All Kids Coalition. The Count All Kids Coalition is an outreach and advocacy campaign comprised of national, state, and local children's organizations and allies. The coalition joined efforts in 2019 to ensure our nation's children were counted in every Decennial Census.

Background

The young child population is a special group in terms of coverage in the U.S. Census for a few reasons, First, the population ages 0 to 4 had the highest net undercount (5.4 percent) of any age group in the 2020 Census. Young children have had the highest net undercount in the U.S. Census for a few decades. Second, the net undercount of young children has increased steadily from 1.4 percent in 1980 to 5.4 percent in 2020. At the same time, the coverage of older children was steady and the coverage of

adults improved over this time period. Third, unlike some adult populations that are responsible for making sure they are included in the Census, young children must rely on others to make sure they are included in the census. Finally, young children are the only demographic group to have a higher net undercount in 2020 than they had in the 1950 Census.

Figure 1 shows the coverage rates for young children (ages 0 to 4), school-age children (ages 5 to 17), and adults (ages 18 and older) from 1950 to 2020.



Between 1950 and 1980, the coverage rate of young children was similar to that of other age groups. However, after 1980, the net undercount rate for young children increased steadily from 1.4 percent in 1980 to 5.4 percent in 2020. Coverage rates for school-age children were relatively stable and the rates for adults improved a little after 1980.

State and County Young Child Coverage Rates for Massachusetts

The Census Bureau prepared a set of state-level experimental net coverage estimate for young children which were released in April 2024. Table 1 shows states ranked by net undercount rate for young children in the 2020 Census. Table 1 shows every state had a net undercount of young children in the 2020 Census and nationally the net undercount was more than one million young children.

Data for Massachusetts show that there was a net undercount of almost 15,000 young children in the 2020 Census and the net undercount rate was 4.15 percent. Massachusetts ranked 25th out of the 50 states and DC in terms of the young child net undercount rates. While young children in Massachusetts had a substantial net undercount in the 2020 Census, the total population in Massachusetts had a net overcount of 2.2 percent.[1]

[1] U.S. Census Bureau (2022, Table 3). "Census Coverage Estimates for People in the United States By State and Census Operations," Courtney Hill, Krista Heim, Jinhee

Hong, and Nam Phan, PES20-G-02RV, https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/coverage-measurement/pes/census-coverage-estimates-for-people-in-the-united-states-by-state-and-census-operations.pdf

Table 1. Demographic Analysis Estimates of Net Coverage Error in the 2020 Census for the Population Ages 0 to 4 by State

Rank	State Name	DA Population Estimate	2020 Census Count	Net Coverage Error	Net Percent Coverage Error Estimate
1	District of Columbia	44,083	37,095	-6,988	-15.85
2	Florida	1,143,120	1,030,284	-112,836	-9.87
3	Hawaii	85,659	77,352	-8,307	-9.7
4	California	2,319,173	2,137,439	-181,734	-7.84
5	Texas	1,971,128	1,819,260	-151,868	-7.7
6	Mississippi	185,510	171,647	-13,863	-7.47
7	Delaware	54,992	51,230	-3,762	-6.84
8	Arizona	419,488	392,370	-27,118	-6.46
9	Louisiana	300,610	281,257	-19,353	-6.44
10	North Carolina	611,557	574,468	-37,089	-6.06
11	Virginia	511,295	481,405	-29,890	-5.85
12	Georgia	651,900	614,218	-37,682	-5.78
13	South Carolina	294,142	277,144	-16,998	-5.78
14	New York	1,125,285	1,060,610	-64,675	-5.75
15	Maryland	365,000	345,047	-19,953	-5.47
16	Nevada	183,803	174,032	-9,771	-5.32
17	Arkansas	189,309	179,575	-9,734	-5.14
18	Oklahoma	253,946	241,242	-12,704	-5
19	Rhode Island	54,534	51,903	-2,631	-4.82
20	Illinois	738,282	705,616	-32,666	-4.42
21	Pennsylvania	698,586	667,816	-30,770	-4.4
22	Tennessee	411,470	393,767	-17,703	-4.3
23	Alaska	50,255	48,104	-2,151	-4.28
24	Missouri	370,450	355,024	-15,426	-4.16
25	**Massachusetts**	**354,754**	**340,020**	-14,734	**-4.15**
26	New Jersey	523,264	502,046	-21,218	-4.05
27	West Virginia	92,944	89,207	-3,737	-4.02
28	Maine	64,000	61,477	-2,523	-3.94
29	Ohio	693,573	666,434	-27,139	-3.91
30	Alabama	297,751	286,529	-11,222	-3.77
31	South Dakota	59,967	57,742	-2,225	-3.71
32	Kentucky	274,385	264,254	-10,131	-3.69
33	Colorado	325,309	314,580	-10,729	-3.3
34	Nebraska	130,620	126,605	-4,015	-3.07
35	Kansas	185,068	179,446	-5,622	-3.04
36	New Mexico	118,403	114,806	-3,597	-3.04
37	New Hampshire	63,389	61,480	-1,909	-3.01
38	Michigan	565,801	548,875	-16,926	-2.99
39	Washington	450,442	437,231	-13,211	-2.93
40	Iowa	195,743	190,064	-5,679	-2.9
41	Connecticut	181,819	176,831	-4,988	-2.74
42	Indiana	420,162	408,828	-11,334	-2.7
43	Minnesota	349,568	340,357	-9,211	-2.63
44	North Dakota	53,751	52,366	-1,385	-2.58
45	Oregon	220,488	215,252	-5,236	-2.37
46	Wisconsin	330,091	322,285	-7,806	-2.36
47	Wyoming	34,505	33,955	-550	-1.59
48	Montana	59,669	59,224	-445	-0.75
49	Utah	241,052	239,780	-1,272	-0.53
50	Idaho	114,638	114,128	-510	-0.44
51	Vermont	28,561	28,555	-6	-0.02
	Total	**19,463,294**	**18,400,262**	**-1,063,032**	**-5.46**

The U.S. Census Bureau reviewed these data products for unauthorized disclosure of confidential information and approved the disclosure avoidance practices applied to this release (CBDRB-FY24-0218).

Note: Demographic Analysis (DA) is a method used to evaluate the quality of the Census. Net coverage error is calculated as the percent difference between the census count and the DA estimate: Net Coverage Error = 100 x [(Census Count - DA Estimate)/DA Estimate]. The DA estimates for Maine and Maryland are rounded to the nearest thousand to adhere to disclosure avoidance guidelines. FIPS (Federal Information Processing Standards) codes uniquely identify geographic areas. For DA methodology statements, refer to https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/technical-documentation/methodology.html.

Suggested Citation:

Demographic Analysis Estimates of Net Coverage Error in the 2020 Census for the Population Ages 0 to 4 by State.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2020 Demographic Analysis (April 2024 release), 2020 Census Demographic and Housing Characteristics File (DHC), and 2020 Census special tabulat**ion (CBDRB-FY24-0218) for the District of Columbia only.** Release Date, April 2024

The Census Bureau also prepared young child net coverage rates for the 1,927 county or county equivalents with at least 1,000 young children ages 0 to 4. There are 12 counties in Massachusetts that meet that criteria. The data for those counties in Massachusetts are shown in Table 2.[2]

Of the 12 Massachusetts counties in Table 2, 10 have net undercounts for young children. Three counties in Massachusetts (Hampden – 6.40%, Essex – 5.52% and Suffolk – 5.71%) have net young children undercount rates higher than the national rate of 5.4 percent. Seven counties in Massachusetts had a net undercount of more than 1,000 young children in the 2020 Census.

[2] https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/net-coverage-error-young-children.html

Table 2. Demographic Analysis Estimates of Net Coverage Error in the 2020 Census for the Population Ages 0 to 4 by County in Massachusetts

County Name	Census Bureau Demographic Analysis Population Estimate	2020 Census Count	Net Numeric Coverage error (Census - DA)	Net Percent Coverage Error Estimate
Barnstable County	7,612	7,479	-133	-1.75
Berkshire County	5,136	5,057	-79	-1.54
Bristol County	29,710	28,175	-1,535	-5.17
Essex County	43,898	41,476	-2,422	-5.52
Franklin County	2,710	2,736	26	0.96
Hampden County	24,961	23,364	-1,597	-6.40
Hampshire County	5,265	5,403	138	2.62
Middlesex County	84,130	80,804	-3,326	-3.95
Norfolk County	38,131	36,599	-1,532	-4.02
Plymouth County	27,500	26,298	-1,202	-4.37
Suffolk County	40,173	37,879	-2,294	-5.71
Worcester County	43,971	43,432	-539	-1.23

The U.S. Census Bureau reviewed these data products for unauthorized disclosure of confidential information and approved the disclosure avoidance practices applied to this release (CBDRB-FY24-0218).

Note: Demographic Analysis (DA) is a method used to evaluate the quality of the Census. "N" indicates that data are not displayed for the selected county because it did not meet the minimum number of young children (1,000 or more) for this release. Net coverage error is calculated as the percent difference between the census count and the DA estimate: Net Coverage Error = 100 x [(Census Count - DA Estimate)/DA Estimate]. FIPS (Federal Information Processing Standards) codes uniquely identify geographic areas. For DA methodology statements, refer to https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/technical-documentation/methodology.html.

Suggested Citation:
Demographic Analysis Estimates of Net Coverage Error in the 2020 Census for the Population Ages 0 to 4 by County.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2020 Demographic Analysis (April 2024 release) and 2020 Census special tabulation (CBDRB-FY24-0218).
Release Date: April 2024

We note that the undercount of young children correlates with a number of factors including:

- Race and ethnicity
- No adult in the household with a high school degree (which may reflect issues of low literacy skills)
- Child poverty
- Female-headed households
- Renters.

Prior to the 2020 Census, the Count All Kids Campaign undertook the first communications research on attitudes to counting young children. Our research found that one in 10 parents would not count their young child and another 8% were not sure if they were supposed to, so that nearly one in five parents were unlikely to count their young children when they responded to the Census. Our research also tested messages that might improve the count of young children and found that messages tying census response to increased funding for programs serving children and families were persuasive. Those messages are included in the Count All Kids toolkit.[3]

[3] https://countallkids.org/resources/count-all-kids-toolkit/

While no one has been able to identify ways that have been proven to improve the count of young children, we believe that there are a number of measures a state could take to improve the count of young children. Some suggestions include:

- Communications campaigns based on our research that emphasizes the importance of including young children in responses to the Census and tying it to increased funding for programs that help young children and families.
- Communications campaigns via media that are used by people with low literacy skills, such as radio, TV, online music stations, and online game sites, that explain why filling out the census matters and that tell people how to respond to the census by phone to make it easier for people with low literacy skills to learn about the census and to respond to it.
- Measures to ensure that multi-unit residence owners and property managers allow enumerators to enter their buildings for the Census count.
- Creating outreach sites at facilities that serve young children, such as childcare centers, pediatric hospitals and offices, WIC programs, diaper banks, and supermarkets that sell baby necessities, with the

capacity for families to fill out the census on-site and personnel to assist them.

- Outreach at schools to help ensure the younger siblings of school children are counted.

We note that Count All Kids Campaign also maintains a website (www.countallkids.org), where we post frequently about the latest research on improving the count of young children and suggest strategies that state and local governments and community organizations can undertake.

We offer this information on the census undercount of young children with the hope that 2030 Census outreach efforts in Massachusetts will focus on this very vulnerable population.