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2020 CENSUS ON THE HORIZON

Uniontown, PA – As April fast approaches, Fayette County officials are gearing up for what they hope will be their most successful Census campaign ever.

Last year, county commissioners successfully formed the Fayette County Complete Count Committee, which has been tasked with promoting the Census' importance and ensuring all goals are met when it's conducted April 1.

As mandated by the U.S. Constitution, the nationwide Census, an official recording of the country's population, is conducted via a distributed survey form every 10 years.

The Census allows federal, state and local governments to conduct fair redistricting, provides statistical support for grant applications, helps communities plan for future needs and more.

According to state Department of Community and Economic Development Secretary Dennis Davin, every citizen not counted is equivalent to a \$2,100 deduction from the overall funding earmarked for Fayette County.

Chief Community Development Specialist Art Cappella of the Fayette County Office of Planning, Zoning and Community Development said the Complete Count Committee will soon meet to generate additional ideas for increasing participation in our communities.

One of the committee's major goals is to encourage more citizens to take the Census online using smart phones and other handheld electronic devices. Cappella said the online option is still in the development stage and will most likely be finalized in the upcoming weeks.

"We'd like to reach the community with at least one Census awareness-building activity each week and communicate regularly through an online presence," he said. "Awareness is key. Motivation is key. A complete count ensures accurate Census data that is critical for government programs, policies and decision making."

The 2020 Census is "pivotal" for Fayette County, Cappella added, because officials hope to maintain their fourth-class county status. Doing so will require increased participation from all communities and cooperation from nonparticipants during follow-up activities.

"Getting the word out via social media is expected to facilitate this," he said.

Census data is used in various ways, including determination of the annual distribution of more than \$675 billion in federal funds back to tribal, state and local governments.

It also helps forecast future transportation needs; determine areas eligible for housing assistance and rehabilitation loans; plan and implement emergency response and other programs and services; design facilities for people with disabilities, the elderly and children; predict housing needs for all population segments; plan for hospitals, nursing homes, clinics and more.

Fayette County Commissioner Chairman Dave Lohr said he's looking forward to a positive Census outcome; knowing the county did the best job possible of spreading the word and getting an accurate count; and seeing the overall impact the Census will have on county funding.

"George Washington University estimates that, for each person not counted in the 2010 Census, Pennsylvania lost more than \$1,500. That really adds up," Lohr said. "The Census affects funding for everything from health care and highways to housing and education; and it's also about our ability to plan and promote economic development. Ultimately, we want to be sure that we in Fayette County receive every dollar due us."

Lohr said the Census is about so much more than how many citizens live in Fayette, as it plays a vital role in maintaining their health and wellbeing.

"It's a simple formula: if we undercount our population, we overstate how much income each resident has, resulting in Fayette County getting less in federal funding than we should," he said. "Without an accurate count, we won't receive our fair share - to the detriment of those most in need, including our seniors and children."

Commissioner Vince Vicites said he's looking forward to achieving the highest participation figures to date this April.

"By getting an accurate count, we can hopefully stay a fourth-class county and continue receiving the same funding levels as a fourth-class county," Vicites said.

Commissioner Scott Dunn said he's looking forward to having all citizens participate in the 2020 Census, because we "don't get another chance at it."

"I'm looking forward to our Census workers hitting the streets, doing what they've been trained to do and encouraging everyone to stand up and be counted, so that our count is as accurate as possible," Dunn said.

Census-generated funding of public health programs, education, infrastructure and more creates a "ripple effect," Dunn added.

"Census numbers affect how an area is defined, and how we're defined affects available funding, such as federal funds for broadband in rural areas," he said. "This is so important to our region, which is why we're working with the Census Bureau every step of the way."

The 2020 Census is currently in its awareness phase, and the Complete Count Committee will switch gears in March, entering the motivation phase. They will reach out to citizens through various government, faith, community, business, media and recruitment partners to encourage participation.

Census participants will be able to complete the 2020 questionnaire online, by mail or phone. All responses are confidential and protected under Title 13 of the U.S. Code.

For more information about the 2020 Census, employment opportunities, or joining a committee, call 724-430-1210, ext. 4308.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.FayetteCountyPA.org.

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