

Testimony of Shamier Settle, Senior Policy Analyst

Submitted to the New York Senate Finance & Assembly Ways and Means Committee Chairs FY 2027 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Local Government General Government

Dear Chairpersons, Kreuger and Pretlow, and honorable members of the New York State Legislature:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Shamier Settle. I am a senior policy analyst at Immigration Research Initiative, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, and I am here today on behalf of the New York State Census Partnership, a statewide organization that includes civic and community groups, foundations and philanthropies, labor, business, academics, and others working for a complete and accurate 2030 census count in New York.

We recently learned that New York is projected to lose two or more congressional districts and electoral college votes after 2030. If our population is in fact smaller, that's the way democracy works. But it's a different story entirely if the state loses representation because we didn't do enough to make sure everyone is counted. The margins can be very thin, and every person truly counts, New York State learned that lesson in 2020 after losing one congressional district by just 89 people.

And, the Census is not just about determining representation. It's also about having accurate information for planning where to build schools, making decisions about business location, and having accurate demographic information about our communities. At Immigration Research Initiative, it's data I work with every day.

The 2030 census is already underway.

The first step of the census is counting addresses. The state needs to invest in making a good count of addresses this year. It may seem early, but this lays the groundwork for the more visible work of community engagement that will need support as the 2030 census count grows nearer. The decennial census is a marathon, not a sprint.

The New York State Census Partnership supports Governor Hochul's inclusion of at least \$3 million for census funding in the state budget proposal for FY 2027. Her proposal includes creation of a census support office and efforts to assist local governments to undertake the Local Update of Census Addresses (known as LUCA) program next year.

LUCA is the first major operation in the 2030 Census cycle and is the foundation for a full and accurate population count. LUCA provides the only opportunity for state, local and tribal governments to review and correct that file before the census begins. LUCA involves deploying local workers to canvass and survey

every house in a town, county, and city. It takes immense time and effort. When a housing unit is missing from the address list, the people who live there are at risk of being omitted from the census entirely, which affects political representation, funding distribution, and planning decisions for the next decade. LUCA gets underway in 2027 but planning and preparation takes place in 2026.

The New York State Census Partnership also wants to go beyond the governor's proposal. We support legislation introduced by Assemblywoman Michaelle Solages and Senator Jeremy Cooney (A.5864/S6898) that would allocate \$15 million, and create a state census assistance office in the Department of State and a New York Counts Commission comprised of seasoned census experts who can help guide and implement state and local census efforts.

The state cannot be effective without community partners. That makes it imperative for the state budget to provide funding for non-profit organizations, community-based organizations, academic specialists and others expert and experienced in census counting to help organize at the local level and support field door-to-door efforts during LUCA field operations. These are major provisions in the Solages/Cooney legislation.

New York State has an extensive network of nongovernment organizations and experts across the state who have a proven track record helping reach out to the "hardest to count" New Yorkers who do not respond to census counting efforts, who do not trust the government, and who are now especially fearful of any government asking them questions about themselves. There is every reason to believe this will be significantly harder in the political context of 2030 than it was in prior decades.

A successful local-based community organizing effort to support this year's county and municipal LUCA efforts need funding, and without those resources, people will be missed. Adequate funding for LUCA outreach effort by local governments, supported by trusted local community groups to help with door-to-door address canvassing and locating garages, basements, attics, farm worker housing, and otherwise missed addresses can make a major difference in rural, suburban, and urban communities across the state.

This year's budget should include *both* the Governor's proposal *and* the provisions in the Solages/Cooney bill to ensure that New Yorkers are fully counted and fairly represented. The decennial census is a marathon, not a sprint.

Thank you.