Census Day USA – April 1, 2020

Terri Ann Lowenthal, a nationally recognized expert, consultant, and frequent speaker on the U.S. census and policy issues affecting federal and local statistics states, “Census taking, under the auspices of the Federal Commerce Department, is often a highly imprecise operation MANDATED by our Constitution.” This mandate is one reason census taking is important, but equally important are the population data in determining how to divvy up federal assistance monies to some three hundred national programs.

Her key “takeaways” from the January 27, 2019 program, “The U.S. Census and Why it Matters to Every Community,” co-sponsored by The League of Women Voters of Norwalk and Stamford, are as follows: Census data are used to determine which areas are considered rural for the purposes of federal spending. Policymakers use census data to make decisions about how to allocate federal funding for programs that specifically serve rural America & the hard to count population. The census helps researchers understand the characteristics and needs of rural America’s population. The digital divide and hard-to-count (HTC) areas and populations make a fair and accurate count of rural America more challenging. The Census Bureau is promoting a multi-mode means of outreach, moving beyond the just the mail-back questionnaire and personal interview to an online response option with several follow-up methods in instances of nonresponses.

 The hard-to-count (HTC) groups and areas are those at particular risk of being missed or undercounted in the census.

The local Norwalk and Stamford participants (a U Conn Stamford student, employees from the Norwalk Family and Children’s Agency, a representative from the Greater Norwalk Hispanic Chamber of Commerce) testified that their HTC clients have fears of confidentiality breaches, immigration issues, unclear statuses, and/or a mixed family status, no trust in the administration, the possibility of citizenship question being added to the census questionnaire, illiteracy and tech illiteracy. Though one of the panel members, who works with new fathers, wonders how he can convince his clients that their personal information won’t be used against them (arrest, deportation, etc.) when he has no faith that the data will not be used against his clients. The panel participants supported the importance of working to educate the HTC population enabling them toward informed decision-making. Lowenthal was firm in stating that the census department does not divulge private info.

The Census Bureau’s web site - census.gov – is where, at this time, you may apply, online, to be a worker or simply to research other census data as may interest you.

Bridgeport Branch AAUW members Laurel Anderson, Diane Fried and Nathalie Taranto, along with League of Women Voters member Jean Rabinow, attended the program.