

July 19, 2010

The Honourable Tony Clement
Minister of Industry, Industry Canada
C.D. Howe Building, 235 Queen Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H5 Canada

Dear Minister:

We are writing to request an opportunity to meet with you to discuss your Government's recent decision to discontinue the Census long-form questionnaire and replace it with a new voluntary questionnaire, the National Household Survey.

We are greatly concerned about this decision. Loss of the long-form Census information will cause considerable economic and social costs. The data are a key part of the decision-making processes of businesses, marketers, public service providers, community service providers, and charities. The effectiveness and responsiveness of public policy initiatives of federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments will be compromised. Canada is a vast country with considerable differentiation in the economic and social situations by geographical location. For many purposes the long-form Census questionnaire is the only valid source of data available of a local nature.

We are all users of information derived from the Census long-form questionnaire, and we would appreciate the opportunity to explain to you how the loss of these data would impair our operations. For many of us this would mean a less efficient use of money we collect from Canadians, in some cases via Government grants. For all of us, it means we will be less sure if we are allocating our resources – be they funds or people – in an effective way, given our respective mandates.

We appreciate that the Government is attempting to broaden the coverage with the replacement to the long-form questionnaire. However, without similar compliance resources and requirements, it will not be possible to achieve reasonable data results with the voluntary form. Many problematic issues can be anticipated with such a move. The very high response rate to the Census provides an unrivalled accuracy and allows many other key sources of data we use from Statistics Canada to be benchmarked and to be drawn from appropriately weighted samples.

It is of course difficult to judge in advance the sort of overall response rate that would be realized for a voluntary survey. Tests of a move from mandatory to voluntary in the U.S. yielded unsatisfactory results and the process was dropped. Past experience indicates that the responses will not be representative of the total population. And in particular the responses from key communities of concern, such as the very poor, Aboriginal communities, recent immigrants and some ethno-racial communities, will likely be quite low. Effective health services would be compromised. Consequently, the impact of these changes will be disproportionately borne by those who are already most vulnerable.

Without the full Census it will be difficult to know how to adjust the responses to correct these imbalances in response rates across socio-economic groups. It will also become more difficult to benchmark other key data series and determine how to effectively target other surveys with relatively smaller samples. Additionally, there will be a great loss in monitoring how various groups are doing over time as there will be a serious break in the data after 2006. This break will render all previous Census results less useful.

We represent a wide spectrum of economic and social interests. But we have a common concern that our ability to function effectively will be seriously harmed by the changes announced to the Census. We hope you will be willing to meet with us to discuss your concerns and ours so that we can find a mutually satisfactory way to preserve the long-form Census so essential to all of us.

We understand that the far-reaching impacts of this decision may not have been fully anticipated and we respectfully request the opportunity to help find a solution that meets the needs of all Canadians.

Al Hatton, President of United Way Canada – Centraide Canada is available to help coordinate a meeting at your earliest convenience.

*Craig Alexander – President,
Canadian Association for
Business Economics and
Chief Economist, TD Bank*

*Rachel Bard – CEO,
Canadian Nurses Association*

*Ken Battle – President,
Caledon Institute of Social Policy*

*Marni Cappe – President,
Canadian Institute of Planners*

*Mel Cappe – President and
CEO, Institute for Research on
Public Policy, and former Clerk
of the Privy Council*

*Debbie Douglas – Executive
Director, Ontario Council of
Agencies Serving Immigrants*

*Don Drummond – Donald
Matthews Fellow and Distinguished
Visiting Scholar, School of Policy
Studies, Queen's University, former
Chief Economist of the TD Bank
and former ADM of Finance*

*Nicholas Gazzard – Executive
Director, Co-operative Housing
Federation of Canada*

*Ken Georgetti – President,
Canadian Labour Congress*

*Roger Gibbins – President and
CEO, Canada West Foundation*

*Al Hatton – President and CEO,
United Way of Canada –
Centraide Canada*

*Alex Himelfarb – Director,
Glendon School of Public and
International Affairs, and former
Clerk of the Privy Council*

*Dr. Matthew Hodge – President,
National Specialty Society for
Community Medicine*

*Jan Kestle – President,
EnviroNics Analytics*

*Frances Lankin – President and
CEO, United Way Toronto*

*Roger Martin – Dean,
Rotman School of Management,
University of Toronto*

*Nik Nanos – President and CEO,
Nanos Research*

*Dr. Cordell Neudorf – Chair,
Canadian Public Health Association*

*Mark Stabile – Director, School
of Public Policy and Governance,
University of Toronto*

*Penni Stewart – President,
Canadian Association of
University Teachers*

*Peggy Taillon – Executive Director,
Canadian Council on
Social Development*

*Mike Veall – President Elect,
Canadian Economic Association*

*Carol Wilding – President and
CEO, Toronto Board of Trade*