

GARY C. PETERS, MICHIGAN, CHAIRMAN

THOMAS R. CARPER, DELAWARE
MAGGIE HASSAN, NEW HAMPSHIRE
KYRSTEN SINEMA, ARIZONA
JACKY ROSEN, NEVADA
ALEX PADILLA, CALIFORNIA
JON OSSOFF, GEORGIA

ROB PORTMAN, OHIO
RON JOHNSON, WISCONSIN
RAND PAUL, KENTUCKY
JAMES LANKFORD, OKLAHOMA
MITT ROMNEY, UTAH
RICK SCOTT, FLORIDA
JOSH HAWLEY, MISSOURI

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

DAVID M. WEINBERG, STAFF DIRECTOR
PAMELA THIESSEN, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR
LAURA W. KILBRIDE, CHIEF CLERK

April 26, 2022

The Honorable Shalanda Young
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Young:

I write to request information about the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) review of the federal standards for race and ethnicity data, and urge you to prioritize the inclusion of a category for people of Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) descent.

OMB sets the government-wide standards for maintaining, collecting, and presenting federal data on race and ethnicity.¹ It is essential that these standards represent the nation's diversity and allow agencies to fully serve every community. OMB's most recent guidance, from 1997, does not include a separate category for the MENA population. Research has shown that this limits the data available on unique challenges faced by the Arab American population, such as healthcare needs and disparities.² Adding a MENA category would provide more accurate data and allow the federal government to better serve this population.

These OMB standards are particularly important for the Census Bureau (Bureau) to ensure high-quality nationwide data. The Bureau has conducted extensive research showing that a MENA category would result in more accurate data for this population. A 2017 Census Bureau report concluded "it is optimal to use a dedicated 'Middle Eastern or North African' response category" but the Bureau is bound by OMB's standards.³

In July 2021, an OMB spokesperson stated OMB is "continuing to review the prior technical recommendations and public comment" on revising the race and ethnicity standards, but OMB has not provided further information or a timeline.⁴ In 2016, OMB sought comment on

¹ Office of Management and Budget, *Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity* (Oct. 30, 1997) (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Revisions-to-the-Standards-for-the-Classification-of-Federal-Data-on-Race-and-Ethnicity-October30-1997.pdf>).

² Letter to OMB from Asraa Alhawli et. al (Feb. 3, 2021) (available at <https://www.accesscommunity.org/health-wellness/can>).

³ United States Census Bureau, *2015 National Content Test Race and Ethnicity Analysis Report* (Feb. 28, 2017) (<https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/final-analysis-reports/2015nct-race-ethnicity-analysis.pdf>).

⁴ *Biden Is Reviving An Effort To Change How The Census Asks About Race And Ethnicity*, National Public Radio (July 19, 2021) (<https://www.npr.org/2021/07/19/1017629384/biden-is-reviving-an-effort-to-change-how-the-census-asks-about-race-and-ethnicity>).

updating the race and ethnicity standards and adding the MENA category, after an Interagency Working Group identified priority areas for improving the standards.⁵ However, OMB did not revise the standards by its stated 2017 deadline, in time for revisions to the 2020 Census.⁶

During your confirmation process, when I asked you about revising OMB's standards to provide for inclusion of the MENA community, you stated, "If confirmed, I will commit to continued work to help ensuring the objectivity and integrity of OMB's Statistical Policy Directives and in this case to accurately capture the diversity of the American people."⁷ When I asked Census Bureau Director Robert Santos during his confirmation process whether he would explore the addition of a MENA category with OMB, he stated, "I would work with OMB and the Chief Statistician of the U.S. to explore the addition of a MENA race and ethnicity category. I would also work to ensure the Census Bureau can collect high-quality data for people of Middle Eastern or North African heritage through proper research and testing."⁸

Given these commitments and the importance of ensuring accurate data to serve the American people, I request OMB provide information on the following topics through a briefing no later than May 31, 2022:

1. The current status of OMB's review regarding the standards for federal data on race and ethnicity, including the consideration of the MENA category;
2. OMB's processes and timelines that pertain to changes in OMB data standards, including a timeline for when OMB will make any additional decisions on updating statistical policies and data standards on race and ethnicity;
3. OMB's past or planned collaboration with other federal agencies including the Census Bureau in its review of the race and ethnicity standards; and
4. OMB's collaboration and communication with diverse community stakeholders in this process.

⁵ Office of Management and Budget, *Review and Possible Limited Revision of OMB's Statistical Policy Directive on Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity*, 81 Fed. Reg. 67398 (Sept. 30, 2016) (Notice) (<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/09/30/2016-23672/standards-for-maintaining-collecting-and-presenting-federal-data-on-race-and-ethnicity>).

⁶ *2020 Census To Keep Racial, Ethnic Categories Used In 2010*, National Public Radio (Jan. 26, 2018) (<https://www.npr.org/2018/01/26/580865378/census-request-suggests-no-race-ethnicity-data-changes-in-2020-experts-say>).

⁷ Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Questions for the Record from Chairman Gary C. Peters to Shalanda D. Young, *Hearing on the Nominations of Shalanda D. Young, of Louisiana, to be Director of the Office of Management and Budget and Nani A. Coloretti, of California, to be Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget*, 117th Cong. (Feb. 1, 2022).

⁸ Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Questions for the Record from Chairman Gary C. Peters to Robert L. Santos, *Hearing on the Nominations of Robert L. Santos to be Director, U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, and Ed Gonzalez to be Assistant Secretary for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Department of Homeland Security*, 117th Cong. (July 15, 2021).

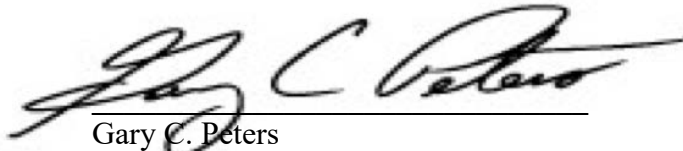
The Honorable Shalanda Young

April 26, 2022

Page 3

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary C. Peters". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

Gary C. Peters
Chairman

Cc: Robert L. Santos, Director, U.S. Census Bureau