



## The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Navajo Nation joins lawsuit challenging the federal government's illegal shortening of the 2020 Census

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – Navajo Nation Attorney General Doreen N. McPaul announced on Wednesday that the Navajo Nation officially joined a lawsuit on Sept. 1, 2020, against the U.S. Census Bureau and the Department of Commerce based on the adoption of an illegally expedited plan, known as the “Rush Plan,” which shortened the time to complete the 2020 Census by imposing a new deadline of Sept. 30, 2020.

The Navajo Nation joined the lawsuit, in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, as a plaintiff alongside several non-profits, city and county governments, and the Gila River Indian Community. The Navajo Nation and other plaintiffs contend that federal defendants illegally curtailed time to complete the 2020 census, which threatens to cause a significant undercount of minority populations, including members of the Navajo Nation.

“The Navajo Nation has worked proactively with the Census Bureau since last year to ensure that the Navajo Nation has a high response rate for the 2020 Census. Unfortunately, the federal government has undermined the time, planning, and resources that the Navajo Nation had dedicated to the Census count by shortening the time period by an entire month and now we are seeking a resolution through the courts. Many of our existing programs rely on federal funding, which is based on census data. Once again, the first people of this country are having to fight for what is right and just,” said Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez.

President Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer recently signed a proclamation recognizing the month of September 2020 as “Navajo Nation Census Month,” to encourage the Navajo people to participate in the 2020 Census to ensure a complete count of all citizens on the Navajo Nation. As of Wednesday, the Navajo Nation’s response rate for the 2020 Census was only 18.2-percent.

“Completing the census is already very challenging for many households due to the lack of telecommunications infrastructure in many Navajo communities. Shortening the census timeframe only adds to the challenges and makes it a lot more difficult, especially for our elder population and those who live in remote areas. We recently approved over \$53 million in CARES Act funding for the expansion of telecommunications and broadband infrastructure, but it will

take time to implement and see the results. We need adequate time to complete the 2020 Census with an accurate count,” stated Vice President Lizer.

The lawsuit was first filed on Aug. 18, shortly after the Department of Commerce and the Census Bureau suddenly and without explanation announced the “Rush Plan” on Aug. 3. The Rush Plan threatens to undercount “hard-to-count” populations, which are primarily minority communities including members of tribal nations.

In the years leading up to the 2020 Census, the federal government carefully planned and prepared to ensure a more accurate count for 2020, by ensuring ample time was provided to complete the in-person data-collection and subsequent data-processing phases of the census. The plaintiffs assert that the federal government had no sound basis for expediting deadlines for these phases with the “Rush Plan.” The plan shortens the time for the non-response follow up phase, which involves census enumerators going door-to-door at residences that have not responded in previous phases. This phase is especially critical on the Navajo Nation.

President Nez and Vice President Lizer state that the federal government’s implementation of the “Rush Plan” is especially detrimental in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has severely impacted the Navajo Nation. The pandemic disrupted census operations across the United States. The federal government originally responded to the disruption of the pandemic by creating a new census plan that pushed back census phase deadlines to provide more time to complete the census. This plan extended the time for data-collection to Oct. 31, 2020. However, on Aug. 3, 2020, the federal government reversed course with implementation of the “Rush Plan.”

“While the court proceedings unfold, we need as many of our Navajo people as possible to respond for the 2020 Census. We will be initiating more wifi hotspots and working closely with the Census Bureau to have boots on the ground to get more people counted. Please take the initiative to self-respond and let your loved ones know as well,” added President Nez.

You may self-respond for the 2020 Census online at <https://2020census.gov> or by calling (844) 330-2020. For more information, please visit the 2020 Census website.

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