



**PREPARED STATEMENT OF
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*Is Brooklyn Being Counted?
Problems With the 2010 Census*

Field Hearing – Brooklyn, New York

**Before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives**

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Chairman Towns, Ranking Member Issa, Members of the Committee, I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony on the problems discovered in our Local Census Offices (LCO) in Brooklyn, New York, and the steps we have taken to resolve them.

In recent weeks our colleagues in the Brooklyn North East Local Census Office (LCO 2225) contacted Census Bureau senior staff and the Office of Inspector General (OIG) alleging that management staff members in the LCO were using an Internet data base called "Fast Data," a software package installed on LCO office computers, to obtain information about households they were supposed to be interviewing. A second set of allegations indicated that staff in two Brooklyn LCOs falsified the population counts for households for which they were unable to determine the household population count. Our investigations confirmed that in both instances staff members acted in clear violation of our procedures, and we are now re-working the affected cases to ensure the data are accurate.

This is deeply troubling; I find it abhorrent to all the principles underlying the work of the Census Bureau. It undermines the outstanding work of hundreds of thousands of our enumerators. Nonetheless, I think it is important to stress that

events of this nature occur in every census in spite of our best efforts. During training we instruct our enumerators to contact senior staff and the OIG if they suspect that procedures are not followed, and we have established mechanisms that we employ to correct any problems that surface.

I would remind the Committee that in Census 2000 we worked with the OIG to investigate allegations of fraud in our Local Census Office in Hialeah, Florida. That investigation found that Hialeah-trained enumerators did not make the required number of visits and telephone calls before contacting a proxy for information, and did not properly implement quality control procedures designed to detect data falsification. We responded to these findings by, among other actions, reworking over 70,996 questionnaires from the Hialeah and Homestead offices.

We also are confident that our quality control operations will identify instances where enumerator data are falsified or procedures are not being followed. We systematically re-interview four percent of each census taker's cases, and sample enumerators' initial completed interviews at a much higher rate. Statistical outlier tests identify additional cases for re-interview for interviewers whose work has different characteristics than the work of other interviewers in their area. This is the most robust re-interview process we have ever implemented – In total, about five percent of the total non-response follow-up workload, or about 2 million addresses, will be re-interviewed. When we identify problems we have procedures in place to correct the data, and we re-work all of the assignments of the enumerators we suspect of falsifying data. This quality assurance process had not yet identified the problems in Brooklyn when our colleagues reported them.

This is not to say that the problems in Brooklyn are insignificant, rather it is to stress that our operations and our close work with the OIG reflect our commitment to collecting data that are as accurate and complete as possible.

Initial Investigation in Brooklyn

The OIG received two complaints on June 14, 2010 alleging fraudulent activity in the Brooklyn Northeast Local Census Office (LCO 2225). Specific allegations focused on completing 2010 Census enumerator questionnaires through the use of a Field Division data source ("Fast Data") without conducting actual respondent or proxy interviews.

During the week of June 14, the New York Regional Census Center conducted their investigation of the complaints. In addition, staff members from the Field Directorate Headquarters in Suitland, Maryland, conducted an additional, independent investigation. Both interviewed various office and field staff. These investigations discovered the following:

During the week of May 30th, the Local Census Office Manager and Assistant Manager for Field Operations in the Brooklyn Northeast office (LCO 2225) conducted meetings with Nonresponse Followup Field Operations Supervisors (FOS) and instructed them to return all enumerator questionnaires that had not yet been completed so that close-out procedures could commence. The supervisors were instructed to sort all questionnaires into two categories: 1) completed questionnaires with respondent information; and, 2) questionnaires with no information or a non-interview status. Those questionnaires with completed respondent information were to be delivered to the office through normal procedures and placed into Office Review. Those questionnaires with a non-interview status were to be placed specifically on the Manager's or Assistant Manager's (Field Operations) desk in a "special pile."

During the week of June 7th, the LCO Assistant Manager for Field Operations recommended to the LCO Manager that Fast Data information be used to fill in missing information on non-interview cases. This Assistant Manager had previously been the Assistant Manager for Quality Assurance (AMQA) and was familiar with Fast Data. The Manager concurred with this recommendation. Between June 9th and 11th, the Assistant Manager printed Fast Data records for approximately 1,000 addresses associated with non-interview status and instructed a handful of select office clerks to transcribe information on questionnaires in the Manager's office on Saturday and Sunday, June 12-13th. A few questionnaires with inserted Fast Data sheets were mistakenly sent to the field for rework on Saturday, June 12th. The Office Operations Supervisor (OOS) who worked on Saturday night refused to follow this procedure and instructed her clerks to not do this either. The OOS resigned at the end of her shift on Sunday morning. It is clear from Fast Data usage logs that the Assistant Manager did not access the system in any substantial manner until June 9th.

An office clerk in field operations contacted the Regional Office via phone message alerting them to this activity on Sunday, June 13th. This same clerk and an Office Operations Supervisor reported this activity to the Office of Inspector General (OIG) Hotline on Monday, June 14th. The Regional Census Center

began their internal investigation on Monday, June 14th based on the anonymous phone message left at the New York Regional Office the day before. The LCO was instructed to cease using Fast Data for Nonresponse Followup data collection immediately. The OIG complaint was transmitted to the Chief of Field Division on Monday evening, June 14th.

Headquarters officials conducted an independent investigation of the allegations on Thursday, June 17th that included nine interviews with office and field staff from the office (LCO 2225), a review of D-948 Nonresponse Followup production and reinterview reports, and Fast Data usage reports provided by the New York Regional Census Center. Headquarters officials completed this investigation on Friday, June 18th and provided preliminary results to the Regional Director that same day. The Local Census Office Manager and Assistant Manager (Field Operations) were terminated later that same day.

The primary finding was that inappropriate use of Fast Data did occur at the direction of the LCO Manager and Assistant Manager. Fast Data information was transcribed on incomplete enumerator questionnaires between June 12 and June 13. A secondary finding is that the LCO Manager and Assistant Manager attempted to cover up this activity.

In order to determine what re-work was appropriate, additional headquarters officials traveled to New York on Monday June 21. As a result of their findings, the decision was made to proceed with re-enumeration of all cases completed on or after June 12 (or not yet checked-in at all) and to direct the office management team to have all re-work conducted by enumerators or crew leaders that did not do the original work in question. It was also decided that additional research should be done on all addresses that were looked up using Fast Data in this Local Census Office. In particular, any address looked up in Fast Data on a date prior to the production case being checked-in would be re-worked.

To ensure that this questionable activity did not spill over into nearby Local Census Offices, headquarters officials conducted an independent investigation of Fast Data usage in adjacent offices in Brooklyn during week of June 21. Fast Data maintains a log of all queries to their data base. We are examining that log for all offices to ensure this problem has not occurred elsewhere. No further evidence of using Fast Data to complete questionnaires has been found.

The total workload that needs to be re-worked is 4,221 cases. To assist with the re-work and additional work in the affected office (LCO 2225), staff members

were transferred from an adjacent Brooklyn Local Census Office (LCO 2223), which had already completed its work. The re-work continues and is nearing completion.

Additional Allegations in Brooklyn

A second allegation was e-mailed to the OIG and me on July 7th by an office supervisor in LCO 2225 stating that a different type of data falsification was occurring in this office subsequent to the actions just described. The allegation was that in some situations enumerators were entering estimated counts for households that appeared inhabited but for which they could not obtain information. This too is a clear violation of procedures.

Headquarters officials conducted an onsite investigation on July 8-9 and 11 that included interviews with staff from LCO 2225, as well as the staff from a nearby office, LCO 2223, that had been brought in to assist with the re-work in LCO 2225. Officials also reviewed questionnaires received from the field in LCO 2225. Simultaneous to the onsite investigation in Brooklyn, headquarters staff analyzed questionnaire data from LCO 2223 and 2225 to determine if data falsification patterns were present.

Results from the investigation indicate that improper procedures were used in both LCO 2223 and 2225. The problem is with cases where households appear to be inhabited but for which enumerators have difficulty obtaining information. In these situations, enumerators are instructed to attempt to obtain information from knowledgeable sources such as neighbors or building managers. We call these "proxy interviews." It appears that when faced with situations where enumerators were unsuccessful in completing proxy interviews they were entering a count of "1" or "2" based on observable information at the housing unit (for example, the presence of pets or names entered on the address plates).

To address this problem we have initiated re-work of all affected cases in LCO 2225 since the enumerators arrived from LCO 2223 to conduct the work, as well as all affected cases worked in LCO 2223. We also conducted additional training to ensure that procedures for completing enumerator proxy forms are better understood. We are now proceeding with analyses of our other LCOs to see if these problems occurred elsewhere. We will report back to the Committee as we learn more.

Conclusion

I want to say again how troubled I am that this occurred. The vast majority of our employees are following procedures and doing excellent work. Thankfully we have procedures in place to address the problems that inevitably occur. I am also thankful for the efforts of the OIG in helping us identify and respond to the issues that surface through their investigations and the whistle-blowing process.

I am joined today by New York Regional Director Tony Farthing, and we are happy to take your questions.