

Census Complete Count Commission holds first meeting

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TRENTON — The state's new Complete Count Commission, tasked with ensuring an accurate and complete count of New Jersey's population in the 2020 federal Census, met for the first time Wednesday, according to the Department of State.

About 60 people from community groups all over the state attended, said Department spokeswoman Trudi Gilfillian.

“This is of paramount importance as the census will determine congressional representation and the allocation of billions of dollars in federal funding for services within our communities,” said Secretary of State Tahesha Way, who chaired the meeting at the War Memorial.

Article I, Section 2 of the Constitution mandates the Census take place every 10 years. The data collected determine the number of seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives and is used to distribute billions in federal funds to local communities, according to the Census Bureau.

Gov. Phil Murphy signed a bill creating the commission Aug. 24.

Gilfillian said there will be a focus on hard-to-count populations including African Americans, Hispanics or Latinos, Asian Americans, non-native English speakers, the homeless and indigent, college students, children under age 5, men ages 18 to 49, and the elderly.

The commission plans to submit a final report to Murphy no later than June 30, Gilfillian said.

The 27-member commission represents municipalities, civic and community organizations, and other groups from across the state, according to the department. But the governor's list of appointees includes no members from southeastern New Jersey, and the commission is dominated by North Jersey residents.

No more than 14 members of the bipartisan commission can come from the same political party, she said. However, six of seven current legislators on the panel are Democrats.

At Wednesday's meeting, Gilfillian said Way administered the oath of office to the commissioners, who heard a presentation from Jeff Behler, regional director, U.S. Census Bureau, on the role of Complete Count Committees. They also discussed Census confidentiality, the citizenship question and hard-to-count community outreach.