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## GOVERNMENT & REGULATIONS

# Money matters: Filling out 2020 Census can bring billions to Florida for roads, health care and more



Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer poses with state leaders from Orange County and TaxWatch Florida at City of Orlando's Census 2020 press conference at Orlando City Hall July 31. Dyer pushed for full statewide participation in next year's census to secure more federal funding.

PHOTO PROVIDED COURTESY OF TAXWATCH FLORIDA

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About \$700 billion in federal funding for roads, health care, infrastructure and more is up for grabs based on the Census 2020 results – and Central Florida leaders want a bigger piece of the pie.

“The importance of a 2020 census simply cannot be overstated,” said Dominic M. Calabro, president and CEO of nonprofit government watchdog and research institute Florida TaxWatch. “It affects everything from health care to transportation, economic development, roads, university funding, K-12th grade funding and early learning – the very dynamics of our entire community.”

Such funding is spent throughout the state with local businesses, nonprofits and schools.

Calabro was among city of Orlando and Orange County officials who spoke at Orlando City Hall July 31 about local efforts to increase participation in the upcoming census beginning April 1, 2020.

With \$700 billion in federal grant programs as well as congressional representation at stake, it's critical that every Floridian is counted, said Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer. "Having an accurate count is critically important, and it's one of the issues that Republicans, Democrats and Independents ought to be able to agree on. We want to do everything in our power to make sure everybody is counted."

In support of state efforts to increase participation in Census 2020, both Dyer and Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings announced chairs for new Complete Count Committees, which will lead Orlando's effort to raise awareness among community members.

Dyer appointed Leila Allen, director of intergovernmental relations for the Orlando Housing Authority, as chair of Orlando's Complete Count Committee, while Demings selected Melvin Pittman, former community, environmental and development services director, as chair of Orange County's committee.

The 132 federally funded programs based on the census cover an array of topics affecting key areas of life, including transportation, health care, education, and water and waste infrastructure. Overall, these federal funds make up more than one-third of Florida's budget.

In Orange County, programs that receive funding from census counts include:

- Early childhood education programs like Head Start
- Free and reduced school meal programs at Orange County

## Public Schools

- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
- Adoption and foster parent assistance programs
- Federal student aid like Pell Grants

Achieving the Census 2020 full participation goal isn't without hurdles for Florida, the third-largest state with a significant transient population. And for Central Florida, another factor that makes it challenging to ensure every individual is counted is the significant migration of Puerto Ricans to Orlando in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in 2017, said Florida Sen. Victor Torres Jr. “As the senator for District 15, which covers parts of Orange County and all of Osceola ... [the Hispanic] growing population in both counties has to be accounted for. I can’t express the fact of how important it is to be counted – for our schools, for our housing, for everything that encompasses how we as a state get to have more money for our residents.”

While Florida sends roughly \$200 billion in taxes to the federal government annually, the state receives less grants per capita than every other state in the nation, according to a 2018 Florida TaxWatch [report](#). The state would get \$14.6 billion more of its tax money back if it received the national average in per capita federal grants.

A 2001 [report](#) from PricewaterhouseCoopers to the U.S. Congress showed that Florida had the fourth largest undercount during the 2000 Census, with over 200,000 individuals unaccounted for.

For the first time, census forms may be submitted online next year, making it easier for residents to respond. [Click here](#) for more information on how to participate in the 2020 Census in Orange County.

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