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‘Get counted’

Elgin launches 2020 census count campaign

By: Gloria Casas



Karla Jimenez, a volunteer with Elgin Census 2020, was one of the voices and faces behind the committee's kickoff Thursday to encourage people to get counted. (courier-News)



Gail Borden Public Library unveiled what it called the world's largest census tablet as the library and the city begin the Elgin Census 2020 campaign. (Courier-News)

Karla Jimenez wants to be counted in the 2020 census because her children are growing up in Elgin and it's important for their future.

“I love my family. I love my friends. I love my community. I love Elgin. Get counted,” said Jimenez, one of the voices behind the Elgin Census 2020 campaign kick-off Thursday at Gail Borden Public Library.

The event drew dozens of volunteers, nonprofit groups and politicians, including U.S. Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, Deputy Gov. Sol Flores, state Rep. Anna Moeller, and state Sen. Cristina Castro and Mayor Dave Kaptain.

The census, required by the Constitution, is taken every 10 years and the results are used to allocate resources and determine how much representation an area will get, Krishnamoorthi said.

“We need to get our fair share, and we should count every single person,” he said.

Krishnamoorthi was a member of the Oversight Committee in the House that led the charge to remove a question about citizenship off of the census form. The U.S. Supreme Court this year blocked the Trump administration’s effort to add a question asking if census respondents have U.S. citizenship.

“There’s no way that we would have been able to be successful in that effort without you,” Krishnamoorthi said. “It was advocates like yourselves that banded together with people in Congress and all across the country to make sure we removed the citizenship question, which creates a chilling effect in counting hard to count communities such as immigrant” communities.

The congressman is himself an immigrant. “I’m not only an immigrant I’m a member of an ethnic, racial and religious minority,” Krishnamoorthi said. “I check all the boxes. It’s so important that in a country as wonderful and as exceptional as the United States of American we stand for the proposition everyone counts. Everyone counts. Therefore, everyone should be counted.”

Hard to count communities can be a challenge, Flores said. But, the state of Illinois created census.il.gov with maps for volunteers and nonprofits to use to deploy resources.

“We have put time, effort and resources to making sure we have the most accurate maps so we know who are those hard to count populations,” Flores said. “We know they are black, Asian and Hispanic communities, children, seniors, members of the LGBTQ community, renters, English as a Second Language learners and rural residents.”

The state of Illinois allocated \$29 million for the census effort, Flores said. It’s the largest per capita state allocation in the country, she said. Gov. Pritzker also established a Census Advisory Panel and the census office in the Illinois Department of Human Services.

Flores thanked volunteers who worked on the campaign and will be on the front lines of the census count.

“I, too, was in your same position 10 years ago working in the community for the 2010 Census. I worked in shelters, on the streets, and in shopping malls to make sure we were counting homeless youth and families,” she said. “I deeply understand, just like all of you, that everyone does count. It doesn’t matter what position they’re in, or where or how they live, they get counted.”

Ket Herena, of the Chinese Mutual Aid Association in Elgin, is one of those volunteers who will be spreading the word about the importance of being counted. She works with the elderly Laos population. Elgin began welcoming people from South Asia in the 1970s, and Herena’s family was among the first to make the city home.

“If I can get the elders to learn about the census, then they are my little birds, and they can spread the word,” Herena said.

Gail Borden Library is heading the Elgin Census 2020 coalition with the city of Elgin and numerous partners. As part of the kick-off festivities, the library unveiled what it called the world's largest census tablet with the words "I Love Elgin" on it in different languages. A fourth-grade class from **Ronald O'Neal Elementary School** performed a song.

"As we walk out of here today, we have a mission," Krishnamoorthi said. "We have to count everyone."

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New law will abolish charter school commission

By Peter Hancock



State Sen. Linda Holmes, an Aurora Democrat, sponsored the bill to abolish the Illinois State Charter School Commission.

SPRINGFIELD -- The state commission that oversees charter schools is set to be abolished next year while its powers and duties will be transferred to the Illinois State Board of Education.

That's the result of Senate Bill 1226, which Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed into law Aug. 23. The measure was sponsored by state Sen. Linda Holmes, an Aurora Democrat.

Charter schools are a unique and sometimes controversial kind of public school. They are generally set up for specific purposes such as focusing on college preparation, science and technology education, or serving students with special needs. Most are run by private, nonprofit organizations, but they operate within a public school district and receive public funding.

Under state law, organizations wanting to establish a charter school must apply for a charter through a local school district, which has the authority to grant the charter for a specified length of time or deny it.

There are 140 charter schools operating in Illinois, 126 of which operate within Chicago Public Schools, according to the Illinois Network of Charter Schools. Until 2011, charter applicants that were denied a charter by a local district could appeal to the Illinois State Board of Education.

In 2011, the General Assembly established the Illinois State Charter School Commission, an independent, appointed group within the State Board of Education that had authority to hear appeals and, if it deemed appropriate, reverse decisions of local districts.

Sean Denny, a lobbyist for the Illinois Education Association, the state's largest teachers union, said in an interview there have been growing concerns about the commission in recent years because of the number of times it reversed decisions of local school boards.

In October 2017, for example, the commission reversed a decision by **Elgin Area School District U-46** to deny a charter for a national charter school organization that wanted to set up a math and science academy, despite the district's concerns the new charter school would not be able to adequately serve low-income, at-risk, and non-English-speaking students.

The commission also has voted a number of times to reverse decisions of Chicago Public Schools, including a 2016 decision to reverse the Chicago school board's decision to revoke a charter for the Betty Shabazz International Charter School.

"We support charter schools. We just want them opened and approved by local boards," Denny said.

Under the new law, beginning July 1, 2020, the State Charter School Commission will cease to exist and the terms of its members will end. The Illinois State Board of Education will then inherit all of the powers and duties of the commission, including the power to reverse local board decisions, and it will take over responsibility for any charter school previously authorized by the commission.

The new law also provides that local districts may not "arbitrarily or capriciously revoke or not renew a charter," and that decisions by the state board of education are subject to judicial review.

"This proposal is about ensuring local control and accountability for charter schools as they exist for public schools," Holmes said Thursday in a news release. "The existing commission has overturned local school boards and I believe those decisions belong in the community, not at the state level."