



July 21, 2010

Industry Canada
Office of the Honourable Tony Clement
Minister of Industry
C.D. Howe Building
235 Queen Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0H5

Dear Minister Clement:

Long-form questionnaire of the 2011 Census of Population

I write on behalf of the Ontario Council of University Libraries. We represent 21 Ontario university libraries with 400,000 students and faculty across the province. In addition, we provide support to researchers from municipalities, provincial and territorial governments, NGOs, social and cultural associations, as well as private sector marketing and business firms and organizations. Our constituency is incredibly concerned and we would appreciate your reconsideration of the recent decision to cancel the mandatory long-form questionnaire as part of the 2011 Census of Population.

Data from the Census long form are unique, and are the de facto source of information related to matters critical to policy development and delivery. This includes such things as education, aging, housing, language, and ethnicity. It is critical in developing and enhancing our understanding of Canadian society. It is used by a broad cross section of society including, individuals, community groups, small and large business, and municipal, provincial and federal governments.

There have been many thoughtful comments already made regarding the importance of the census and how significant it is to ensure that we make the right decision. If we eliminate the 2011 long form, we can not go back and replace it. It will be lost forever.

There are a few key points that we would like to highlight:

- There was no consultation on a decision so significant. Although we are appreciative of the open public consultation around the 2011 census, we are disappointed there was never any indication that there would be no long form. We feel that the significant expression of concerns around this decision from all across the country, from the public to the private sector, indicates that there needs to be a dialogue.
- There is a significant question around the validity of the National Household Survey. A larger sample does not imply quality data. It has been very well articulated by several respected statisticians that simply asking more people to fill out the National Household Survey will not create a viable or comparable survey. This is something that we should be very concerned about. The census is so important because it is the only survey where Canadians from all socio-economic groupings are sampled and the quality of the information is indisputable.
- Cancelling the long form would have far reaching implications. Many post-censal surveys (including polls) depend on the census sampling frame. Without this sampling frame we will be unable to ensure the validity of the information in these surveys.

- Privacy is a significant issue, and Statistics Canada is one of the most respected institutions in the world when it comes to protecting the privacy of survey respondents. Canada is the envy of the world in terms of citizen response rates and this is a direct reflection of the trust that the general public places in the institution. For the government to jeopardize this trust in a public forum is irresponsible and of great concern to us.

The dialogue concerning this decision has been significant within our broader community. The Canadian Census is unique, and an internationally recognized building block for creating evidence-based public policy. It is also critical in developing and fostering many private sector firms. We feel strongly that there needs to be more dialogue before we undertake this irreversible decision. Time is of the essence. As with other undertakings of such importance, if there are privacy concerns then we should consider devoting the significant additional resources going into the NHS towards educating the public about the importance of this information. OCUL is well positioned to help the government in this undertaking.

Yours sincerely,



Leslie Weir
Chair, Ontario Council of University Libraries
&
University Librarian, University of Ottawa

c.c.

Standing Committee on Industry Science and Technology – Michael Chong (Chair)
The Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper;
Opposition critics for Industry Canada : Robert Bouchard (Bloc); Marc Garneau (Liberal); Brian Masse (NDP)