



April 22, 2019

Senate State, Veterans & Military Affairs Committee  
State Capitol  
200 East Colfax  
Denver, Colorado 80203

Mr. Chair and Honorable Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Colorado Hospital Association (CHA) and its over 100 hospitals and health systems in the State of Colorado, I write today to provide testimony on and support of House Bill (HB) 19-1239.

CHA appreciates the sponsors' efforts to create a census outreach grant program to promote accurate counts in the decennial census. From a healthcare perspective, and specifically a hospital perspective, there are many reasons why accurate census data is important. Three of these reasons are highlighted below.

First, census data informs Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements. Over 35 percent of all Coloradans are insured by Medicare and Medicaid, but this percentage varies from region to region. For some hospitals, upwards of 90 percent of the patients that walk through their doors are insured by Medicare or Medicaid. For these hospitals, accurate census data is essential to maintaining life-saving care in their community.

Next, accurate census data also helps Colorado address critical workforce shortages in rural and underserved areas of the state. Census information is used to help determine health professional shortage areas and then target resources for programs such as the National Health Services Corps to those areas.

Finally, accurate census data is essential to public health programs and research, such as federal public health research projects like the National Health Interview Survey and the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project. These projects are redesigned after every census and information gathered from these projects help inform how care is delivered in hospitals across the state.

There is only one opportunity every ten years to gather this data and CHA believes this legislation helps ensure data that is gathered is accurate. We would urge you to support HB19-1239. Thank you for your work on this vital issue and your consideration of this written testimony.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Ewing', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Joshua Ewing  
Associate Vice President, Legislative Affairs

**HB19-1239 Census Outreach Grant Program**

Senate State, Veterans & Military Affairs Committee, April 22, 2019, 1:30pm, SCR 357

Kelly Erb, Policy Analyst, Colorado Rural Health Center

Mister Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Kelly Erb, Policy Analyst at the Colorado Rural Health Center. The Colorado Rural Health Center is the nonprofit, nonpartisan State Office of Rural Health and Rural Health Association. Our members are hospitals, clinics, providers and communities in rural Colorado. I am here today to speak in support of HB-1239 Census Outreach Grant Program.

Colorado is a rural state. Rural Colorado represents 73% of our state's landmass. 47 of 64 Colorado counties are designated by census-driven data as rural or frontier.

Vast geography aside, the economic gap between urban and rural areas of Colorado has continued to widen since the Recession and the uneven recovery that followed. While the state has one of the best economies in the nation, Colorado has one of the largest economic gaps between urban and rural areas in the country. Colorado's rural population tends to be older, face higher rates of poverty and unemployment, and are sicker than folks in urban parts of the state. Rural Colorado also has a significant shortage of healthcare providers, fewer insurance carriers, and higher insurance costs. These factors contribute to rural Colorado's higher utilization of federal assistance programs, including Medicaid and SNAP.

- 10% of rural Colorado households are enrolled in SNAP, compared to 8% in urban Colorado.

- Rural Colorado has a 26% Medicaid rate compared to 17% in urban.

- And 11% of rural Coloradans have no health insurance, compared to 6% of urban Coloradans.

As these stats illustrate, rural Colorado is already at a disadvantage, and without the support in this bill to ensure a full Census count, rural Colorado will continue to be left behind.

As others have told you, in 2016 *alone*, census data guided the allocation of over \$13 *billion* in federal funds to Colorado, more than \$700 million of which was dedicated solely to programs for rural communities. Even the definition of rural and frontier used by our organization and the state is guided by census-driven data. A rural county is a non-metropolitan county with no cities over 50,000 residents, and a frontier county has a population density of 6 or fewer residents per square mile.

An example specific to rural healthcare access are HPSA's, or Health Professional Shortage Areas, which must be in a designated rural or frontier area. Federally-funded loan repayment for healthcare providers who commit to serving in rural areas is limited to HPSA's. An accurate census count is imperative to truly determine areas of the state that need the limited federal loan repayment dollars.

It is in the best interest of not only rural Colorado communities but also the entire state to ensure a full count in the 2020 Census. Please support rural Colorado and vote yes on HB1239. Thank you.