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Upcoming census is mandatory, necessary in US

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The 2020 United States census is coming soon, and it's a chance for local residents to stand up and be counted.

Chad Stover, partnership specialist for the United States Census Bureau, passed on basic information about the process at the Delaware County Regional Planning Commission meeting held Thursday.

The census is mandatory — Article 1, Section 2 of the US Constitution, the document we use to govern the nation, states it must be done every 10 years. With 2020 also being a presidential election year, the data collected may be more important than ever.

The census is necessary — the data is used to determine political representation, boundary-setting, and $6.7 trillion in federal funding for the states; all for the next decade. Ohio lost two seats in the U.S. House of Representatives in the 2010 census, but could gain them back, depending on the 2020 population. And if a particular age group — whether it is senior citizens, young adults or children — is under-counted, they may not get the funding they should have received.

"The numbers you get in 2020, you live with until 2030," Stover said. "I want to make sure we put our best foot forward. If you say I don't want to give my information out, think about what you're doing. You're impacting the community now."

Next week, schoolchildren will bring home letters reminding their parents about the upcoming census. Reminder letters will also be mailed out in March.

For the first time, the census will be available online starting March 12. There will be other ways to respond, but they will cost taxpayers more.

"Nine questions for the first person, seven for every person after that," Stover said. "The information is confidential. We use the information for statistics."

April 1 is Census Day. The census will be mailed to those who didn't respond online the first week of April. In addition, census workers will be sent out among the homeless to get their data for three days at the end of March. Stover said the homeless population tends to be proud to participate in the census, and they see it as their civic duty despite their situation.

For those people who didn't return their form, local census workers will be knocking on your door in May to ask the questions. The data will be entered into a tablet-style computer instead of by paper.

Stover said the US population estimate is 330 million people, and it will take 500,000 census employees to count them.

“It is the largest peace-time operation the government does,” he said.

In response to questions by commission members, Stover said the forms won’t go to post office boxes, only to addresses (via utility bills). Also, there will not be a citizenship question on the census due to a Supreme Court ruling.

For more information, visit 2020census.gov.