



∴ ontario library association

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

July 29, 2010

Dear Minister Clement,

I am writing on behalf of the Ontario Library Association to express our serious concerns regarding your Ministry's recent decision to eliminate the Mandatory Long Form section of the 2011 Census and replace it with a voluntary survey.

The Ontario Library Association is the oldest continually operating and the largest library association in Canada. One of our mandates is to advocate the democratic right of all individuals in Ontario to have free and equitable access to information. However, the right to access information is meaningless if that information lacks value.

Our concern about the proposed voluntary National Household Survey is that it will not give reliable information about the Canadian population because there will be non-response bias. In particular, response to voluntary surveys is known to be lower among groups such as low income households, members of minority groups, immigrants, single parent families, the less educated, and people who are not native speakers of English or French. As the census is used to gauge and adjust for non-response bias in other surveys, its loss will affect the quality of information derived from them as well. Changing how the information is collected will also mean that the 2011 data will not be comparable to previous census years, making it impossible to track changes over time and measure trends.

The Census long form is the single most reliable source for data on our population's education level, income, ethnic and religious makeup, occupations, and other key characteristics, from the national to the neighbourhood level. As librarians, we are aware of the multitude of ways Canadians rely on this data every day. This information is a heavily used part of the depository collection of public and academic libraries. Small business owners, educators, students, genealogists, community historians, journalists, service providers and others all come to the library to use data collected by the Long-Form, either directly or by accessing publications based on it. Academic researchers also use the data to better understand Canadian society and help improve it.

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Like our users, libraries themselves use census Long-Form information to help us plan our services, track changes in our communities, and anticipate the needs of our users. Library services help new immigrants learn official languages and acclimatize themselves to Canada, help the unemployed find jobs, and help disadvantaged children and adult learners excel in school. These are all groups likely to be severely underrepresented in a voluntary survey, damaging our ability to plan for and provide services for them.

We would also like to highlight that while Statistics Canada undertook a consultation process for the 2011 census as it does for every census, the idea of dropping the long form was not raised. This change is not being made as a result of any public outcry and is being done against the advice of virtually every stakeholder group, including the Ontario Library Association whose membership approximates 5,500 librarians and information professionals.

The Ontario Library Association thanks you for your consideration of our comments and respectfully requests that this decision be reconsidered.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Ann Mavrinnac".

Mary Ann Mavrinnac  
President, Ontario Library Association

C.C.: The Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada