

# All Bronxites will pay if we don't stand up & be counted

**A**fter a vigorous public awareness campaign and an intense mail-back effort for questionnaires, the 2010 census is winding down. Enumerators trained by the Census Bureau and cleared by the FBI will be knocking on doors through July 10.

The early days of summer represent the last chance for those not yet counted to be in the 2010 census mix. At stake politically is the reapportionment of 435 seats in the House of Representatives, the alignment of the 435 Electoral College members who select the President and the reshaping of districts at the city as well as state level. The distribution of more than \$4 trillion in federal funds is the economic piece of the equation.

With so much riding on the census, one might think that Bronx residents who did not mail back or receive a form would be opening their doors for enumerators without hesitancy. Sadly, this is not always the case. Apathy and skepticism could cause our borough to be the most undercounted in New York City, lose out on \$1 billion in federal funds between 2011 and 2020 and be underrepresented at all levels of government.

In 2000, census analysts believe the Bronx was undercounted by 2.5%, or 35,000 persons, comparable to the entire population of Long Beach, L.I., or New City in Rockland County. This undercount



resulted in the Bronx losing about \$102 million in federal funds each year since 2001, or \$1 billion in the last decade.

While many believe the 2000 undercount was most prevalent in the South Bronx, there is concern about our borough's northern portion this year. According to data from the New York City 2010 Census Office, neighborhoods that comprise the northeast and north central Bronx have had the lowest mail-back response rate. Fewer than half the residents of Williamsbridge-Olinville (49.6%) and Woodlawn-Wakefield (49.7%) mailed back their forms.

A shade above half of those who live in Eastchester, Edenwald and Baychester (51.7%) did so.

The northeast and north central Bronx in some ways represent a "perfect storm" for an undercount. The areas have a significant immigrant population, including a good number who may be undocumented. Language barriers exist as well, as the areas have experienced an increase in people from South Asia

and West Africa. In addition, whether fluent in English or not, many immigrants come from countries where government mistrust runs deep.

**T**hough known for home ownership, the recession has meant that many one- or two-family houses in the northeast and north central Bronx are now in foreclosure, increasing the anxiety level of their owners and likelihood that they do not wish to be counted. With some homes illegally subdivided and others falling prey to speculators, distrust is high among many residents.

Interestingly, the region also has concentrations of public housing. Many projects have individuals who reside on the premises but are not listed on leases. Frequently in this category are young men with criminal records. If revealed, their families could be rendered homeless.

These challenges notwithstanding, we have to do everything possible to insure an accurate count throughout the Bronx, but especially in those communities where the "perfect storm" is brewing. Opening our doors now can help avoid Hurricane Katrina-like consequences later.

*Ken Small is development director of BronxWorks, a multifaceted borough social service organization, which recently changed its name from the Citizens Advice Bureau.*