Attorney General Frosh, AARP Maryland, and U.S. Census Bureau Urge Vigilance Against Census 2020 Fraud

BALTIMORE, MD (March 11, 2020) – Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh, AARP Maryland, and the U.S. Census Bureau are joining forces to reassure Marylanders about the safety and security of the 2020 Census, while also urging vigilance against fraud. Invitations to complete the U.S. Census will arrive in mailboxes across the country this week, and for the first time, people will be invited to complete the form online or by phone, as well as by the traditional method of U.S. Mail.

At a press conference yesterday, Attorney General Frosh, AARP Maryland State President Jim Campbell, and Assistant Regional Census Manager, Philadelphia Region of the U.S. Census Bureau, Thomas F. Coogan, Jr., emphasized the importance of the decennial count, which will determine funding formulas for dozens of federal programs amounting to more than $675 billion in spending. Census counts are also used to determine state representation in the U.S. House of Representatives, congressional and state legislative districts, and electoral votes. The Census counts every resident living in the United States, regardless of their citizenship status. There is no citizenship question on the 2020 Census.

There are legitimate efforts being undertaken to reach out to the public online, over the phone, in person, through literature dropped-off at homes, and in the community about the Census. However, the Census also opens an opportunity for government impostor fraud. Legitimate Census surveys, whether in person, by phone, or online, will never ask for the following information:

- Citizenship status
- Social Security number
- Requests for money or donations
- Anything on behalf of a political party
- Bank or credit card account numbers
- Your personal schedule (e.g., when you leave or come home from work)

In addition, the Census Bureau almost exclusively uses U.S. mail to request participation in the survey; only after several weeks of reminders to participate will an in-person visit take place. An unsolicited email that claims to be from the U.S. Census is almost definitely a scam or attempt to steal personal information.
“Scammers are very shrewd about capitalizing on current events,” said President Campbell. “And with the census coming just once every 10 years, there is ample room for confusion and disinformation. That is why we want to get the word out about what a legitimate census worker will, and will not, ask you. For instance, they will never ask for your social security number or other sensitive information and will never demand money or threaten jail time.”

“Responding to the Census is vitally important, but don’t allow yourself to become a fraud victim while trying to do your duty,” said Attorney General Frosh. “If you believe you’ve been the victim of a Census scam, call our Consumer Protection Division hotline at 410-528-8662 for help. Our office can help you take steps to protect your personal information if it’s been compromised.”

A video of yesterday’s press conference is available on the Attorney General’s YouTube page at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZU0gSksywnE.