



July 20, 2010

The Honourable Stephen Harper  
Prime Minister of Canada  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

I am writing on behalf of the Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO) to express our astonishment and deep concern about the recent decision of your government to discontinue the mandatory long-form questionnaire for the 2011 Census in favour of a voluntary National Household Survey (NHS).

The SPNO is a network of 18 social planning organizations throughout the Province of Ontario. As local research and development organizations, we work to enhance the quality of life of people as they live and work in local communities. We work to create an equitable and socially inclusive Ontario.

Census data provides some of the most reliable socio-demographic data at the neighbourhood level. It cannot be replaced by a voluntary survey such as the NHS. In our experience over many decades in communities, we have never been made aware that local citizens resented the time needed to respond to the survey nor that they believed their privacy was being invaded. Quite to the contrary, grass-root community groups have been pleased and grateful to have access to quality data that provide insights on their communities so that as citizens they can engage in responsible and informed decision making on local issues.

The information from the Census provides communities with valuable knowledge about themselves. Without this information local communities would be without local knowledge about:

- the make-up of our community- age, gender, ethnicity, income
- emerging demographic trends – aging population, decreasing birth rate, increasing international immigration
- local labour force changes – unemployment, under-employment, participation
- place of work and place of residence – life and work balance, family life, transportation and environmental issues
- educational attainment

Census data is a critical building block of public and community programs as they are informed by local demographics. Census data provides quality information to guide community dialogue and citizen engagement on important social and economic issues facing a community.

The Social Planning Network of Ontario has the confidence that the Government of Canada will rescind their recent decision on the 2011 Census long form questionnaire so that citizens will have the information they need to be active and responsible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janet Gasparini".

Janet Gasparini  
Chair, Social Planning Network of Ontario

cc.

The Honourable Tony Clement, Minister of Industry Canada  
The Honourable Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario