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July 27, 2010

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

Dear Minister:

RE: CANCELLATION OF THE LONG FORM SURVEY IN THE 2011 CENSUS

The Waterloo Students Planning Advisory (WSPA) is an independent, student-led planning advisory group based out of the School of Planning at the University of Waterloo in the City of Waterloo, Ontario. Similar to that of a review agency (such as a Conservation Authority), we provide urban planning comments and insights on local development applications, policy documents, municipal planning projects, and on decisions impacting planning research and innovation from a student perspective.

As an advocate for well-informed decision-making in urban planning, we were extremely disappointed by your office's decision to eliminate the mandatory long-form census questionnaire and replace it with a voluntary household survey. The anonymous information gathered from the long-form census is crucial to our understanding of urban demographics that helps ensure good land-use planning decisions. Detailed demographic data gathered from the long-form census is pivotal to a municipality's ability to identify neighborhoods of relative social strength and those that would benefit from publicly-led improvements. Targeted municipal investments are based on this statistical information to help improve the lives of millions of Canadians in neighborhoods that are in need of this assistance.

Accurate data is a powerful tool that planners use in service of the public. It is in the public interest that community planners are informed by the best and most reliable data available so that decision makers can implement the best and most appropriate policy decisions.

Decisions based on statistics are only as good as the data on which the statistics themselves are derived. If the long form census is replaced by a voluntary household survey, the incomplete and skewed data collected will render the statistics inaccurate at best, and more likely useless for the task of making informing planning decisions.

In addition to offering urban planners a picture of present urban conditions, comprehensive demographic data allows for the accurate projection and examination of trends over time. For example, Canada is increasingly a country of new immigrants, and determining where new Canadians choose to congregate and settle and how much they earn after arrival is a vital matter of public concern. However, low-income, new Canadian residents are among the groups identified as least likely to complete a voluntary survey, thus severely affecting the validity and availability of this essential data and our ability to provide necessary social services to these groups.

While the long-form census questionnaire may be perceived as intrusive or a burden to those required to complete it, the census is a civic responsibility that serves the greater public good and benefits the individual to the same extent that it benefits the community.

At a time when young people already have little faith or interest in public affairs and are voting in low numbers, your Ministry is disregarding an important part of government decision-making with little or no engagement with the public. Canada's youth will require more transparency and accountability if they are to take part in the electoral process once again.

We kindly request that your Ministry reverses its decision to make the long-form census questionnaire optional.

Sincerely,

WATERLOO STUDENTS PLANNING ADVISORY



Mackenzie Keast
President



Erin Harrison
Environment Chair



John O'Reilly
Urban Design Chair



Chelsey Tyers
Heritage Chair



Mike Witmer
Policy Chair



Eric Pisani
Transportation Chair

cc: Peter Braid, MP Kitchener-Waterloo
Stephen Woodworth, MP Kitchener Centre
Marc Garneau, Liberal MP
Brian Masse, NDP MP
Robert Bouchard, Bloc Quebecois MP
Elizabeth Witmer, MPP Kitchener-Waterloo

John Milloy, MPP Kitchener-Centre
Clerk, City of Kitchener
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Clerk, Region of Waterloo
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