

Officials stress how census can empower Asian Americans

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Body

SPRINGFIELD — Elected officials in Illinois who make up the Asian American Caucus, along with local community organizations, on Friday urged Asian residents to participate in the census. During a Friday news conference in Chicago's Chinatown Square, Rep. Theresa Mah, a Chicago Democrat, spoke about how the census has benefited the Asian community and why taking part is important.

"Ten years ago, the population that I represent was split into four different state representative districts, effectively giving them no power or say," Mah said. "The census was really important in helping us draw the boundaries for our current district to empower Asian Americans in this area and give them a voice in state government." Before the 2010 census, no Asian Americans held a statewide elected position in Illinois. In 2016, Illinois elected Asian Americans to federal, state and county governments simultaneously for the first time. That election also sent Mah to the General Assembly. Speakers at Asian American Census Day pointed to Chinese language, Hindi, Korean, Urdu and Arabic ballots and registration forms as examples of access to the legislative process Asian Americans received due to the census. The state's self-response rate for the 2020 census stands at 67.5%, which is lower than 2010's response rate of 70.5%. While the Illinois response rate is higher than the national average, the chance of losing federal funding and representation in the U.S. House as a result of undercounts looms large. Outreach normally done by community groups has been complicated by the coronavirus pandemic. Grace Chan McKibben, executive director of Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community, says her organization and others have been "working creatively" to reach out to the community — "through phone, Chinese and mainstream media, and social media, word-of-mouth, sharing information through community organizations and businesses to ensure that everyone is counted," McKibben said.

Graphic

Theresa Mah Theresa Mah Capitol News Illinois file photo State Rep. Theresa Mah, a Chicago Democrat, says the 2010 census "was really important in helping us draw the boundaries for our current district to empower Asian Americans in this area and give them a voice in state government."

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