



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

13 July 2010

Dear Minister Clement:

I am writing on behalf of the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) to express our grave concerns regarding your Ministry's recent decision to eliminate the Mandatory Long Form section of the 2011 Census.

Established in 1975, the ACA is a national not-for-profit organization representing archivists across Canada. Headquartered in Ottawa, the ACA's mandate is to provide leadership to the country's archival profession, and to facilitate an understanding and appreciation of Canada's documentary heritage.

The ACA believes the Mandatory Long Form is an essential tool in gaining a more in-depth and critical understanding of Canadian society, now and well into the future. Businesses, municipalities, advocates for minority groups, social scientists from many fields – including members of Statistics Canada – and a host of others, have all recognized the significance and importance of the Mandatory Long Form, and as a result have expressed their opposition to this change. The elimination of this document will weaken the ability of these groups to develop products and services for identified clientele; to plan and provide effective social services; and to study and understand the fabric, the needs, and the changing nature of a diverse Canadian society.

In addition to these concerns, the ACA feels that eliminating the Mandatory Long Form will have a major impact on the ability of future generations to understand the evolution of Canadian society. This decision will mean that data from the 2011 Census will not be directly comparable to prior censuses. Further, and even more troubling, is the fact that the move from an Mandatory Long Form sent to twenty percent (20%) of the country's population, to a voluntary version sent to thirty percent (30%) of Canadians will create a response bias. Research has demonstrated conclusively, that certain segments of the population have differing response rates compared to others. All information gained from a voluntary section of the next Census will necessarily be considered unreliable and skewed. It stands to reason then, that the usefulness of the 2011 Census will be severely compromised, especially for both present and future research purposes.

It is the ACA's understanding that your Ministry's reason for eliminating the Mandatory Long Form was that "many" Canadian citizens had concerns about their privacy and found the census to be intrusive. However, as no broad-based consultation process was entered into in order to gauge the extent of the privacy concerns expressed by Canadians, the ACA finds this explanation hard to fathom. Nor, it appears were any attempts made to understand how census data is employed by federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal governments, businesses, scholarly and other researchers, or ordinary citizens. Consequently, the ACA believes your Ministry cannot possibly have weighed the arguments, both for, and against, the Mandatory Long Form. We therefore strongly encourage you to consult all stakeholders on this extremely important matter, prior to engaging in such a drastic change.

In addition, the ACA believes a balance must be struck between the right of Canadians to maintain their privacy, and their right to access. In the past, the handling of Canadian census data has successfully



addressed privacy concerns. Statistics Canada takes the protection of privacy extremely seriously. To our knowledge, there have been no known breaches of confidentiality pertaining to census information. Nor do we have any reason to doubt that Statistics Canada will continue to protect this fundamental right of Canadians in the future. At the same time though, it must be understood that the right of citizens to access information regarding the society they live and evolve in, both now and in the future, must not be compromised in the name of privacy.

The members of the ACA serve a large and extremely diverse number of research communities, which include, but are by no means restricted to, academics, government ministries at all levels, and genealogists. Each depends on robust and comprehensive census data, which to this point, has been found in the national censuses. We are very concerned that eliminating the Mandatory Long Form will be extremely detrimental to the current and future understanding of Canadian society. With this in mind, we encourage you to reconsider the decision of your Ministry; and at the very least, the changes contemplated must not be enacted until broad public consultation and informed Parliamentary debate has taken place.

Thank you for your attention to the ACA's concerns, and I would be pleased to discuss them further with you. I can be reached at the coordinates found below.

Yours sincerely

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