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For Immediate Release

September 2, 2020

GILA RIVER INDIAN COMMUNITY JOINS CENSUS LITIGATION TO CONTINUE OPERATIONS TO OCTOBER 31, 2020

Sacaton, AZ - Today, the Gila River Indian Community (“Community”) joined litigation that seeks to require the Census Bureau to continue census operations through October 31, 2020, as set out in the Bureau’s COVID-19 plan announced in April, instead of the condensed timeframe that would conclude operations by September 30, 2020. The litigation, National Urban League v. Ross asks the Census Bureau to revert to prior requests by the Census Bureau to extend the deadlines for census operations, apportionment counts and redistricting data in response to the disruption in census activities caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

On April 13, 2020 the Census Bureau issued a statement that a modified timeline was necessary due to the COVID-19 pandemic which caused an interruption of traditional census operations. That timeline extended census operations to October 31, 2020, and extended the statutory deadlines for apportionment counts and redistricting data to April 30, 2021 and July 31, 2021, respectively. However, rather than adopting that modified timeline to allow accurate census counts during the pandemic, the Administration has instead shortened the timeline for census operations to September 30, 2020, while retaining the apportionment and redistricting count timeline of December 31, 2020.

The Community feels strongly that extended deadlines are needed to ensure an accurate count, not only for the Gila River Indian Community, but for Indian Country as a whole. On the Gila River Indian Community Reservation and Reservations throughout the Nation, in-person enumeration is the most effective method of completing census data, especially in rural areas that need a census-generated geographic code to complete the census. In-person census operations were interrupted in March and field operations only resumed on August 11th. The Community is still under shelter-in-place Executive Orders to prevent the transmission of the coronavirus, so an extension is necessary to allow time for the count to continue while maintaining the necessary safety measures needed during the pandemic.

American Indians and Alaska Natives living on Reservations were the most undercounted population in the 2010 census. Unlike other governmental jurisdictions, tribal nations have no tax base to draw from so funding for critical governmental programs such as housing,



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education, healthcare, transportation, and elder and youth programs rely on census data for allocation.

Governor Stephen Roe Lewis stated, “to cease census operations earlier than set out in the Bureau’s own COVID-19 census plan with full awareness that tribal nations, the most undercounted population in the 2010 census are also the most impacted coronavirus demographic, is a breach of the governmental relationship that exists between the federal government and tribal nations. This federal government would knowingly be ensuring that much-needed tribal programs would be significantly cut because of the conditions created by the pandemic and the interruption of census operations.”

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Gila River Indian Community located on 372,000 acres in south-central Arizona and home to the indigenous O’odham (Pima) and Pee Posh (Maricopa) people. The Tribe is comprised of seven districts, the administrative offices and departments are located in Sacaton, and serve the people throughout these seven community districts. 100% of its profits from gaming and 17 other Enterprises are utilized by the community providing services and opportunities to achieve the highest quality of life.