

Bristol kicks off census committee

By **SUSAN CORICA**
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BRISTOL — The census is “a monumental effort that happens every 10 years” and relies on local efforts to make it a success, said Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz.

Bysiewicz, who is leading the state effort for the 2020 census count, was at the kickoff event for the city’s Complete Count Committee at the Bristol Public Library Tuesday afternoon.

An accurate count is crucial for Connecticut, “because we get almost \$11 billion in federal funding each year based on U.S. Census numbers,” she said. “Small businesses and Fortune 500 companies alike make decisions on where to locate their operations based on census information. It’s also really important to communities like Bristol that depend on federal funding.”

The count also determines federal funding for programs like Head Start, school lunches, WIC, SNAP, Medicaid, CDBG block grants, highway and construction projects, and a lot more, she said.

For every person undercounted “we lose \$2,900” in funding,” she said.

This will be the first time in the history of the census, since 1790, that people can fill out the forms online. Since not everyone has access to a computer at home, libraries providing online access to the public will be key.

About 20 percent of Connecticut’s population is considered to live in a “hard to count” area, she added. “Bristol is one of those areas, because there’s a lot of multi-family housing and some transient part of the community here, that’s going to make it more important to get an accurate count.”

The final challenge is being litigated by the U.S. Supreme Court now, whether the citizenship question will be included on the census, Bysiewicz said. “Regardless of how the courts resolve that, none of the personal information that’s collected by the U.S. Census bureau can be used against people, or can be used by local, state, or federal law enforcement agencies.”

Mayor Ellen Zoppo-Sassu introduced members of the city’s newly-formed Diversity Council,



Susan Corica | Staff

Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz, fourth from the left, was at the kickoff event for the city’s Complete Count Committee for the 2020 census Tuesday.

who will form the census count committee headed by Jeff Israel.

“I’m looking at the census as an opportunity to take a snapshot of Bristol and really put us in the best light as possible,” she said. “Even though the census count is not our job, as a municipal government we are so heavily reliant on it it’s imperative that we all take a role.”

Zoppo-Sassu said the 1900 census showed Bristol had 9,643 people, 20 years later it had jumped to 20,620 people. “At that point we had just built a new high school and we decided that we had to build another one because we couldn’t fit everyone due to the industrial revolution and everything happening here,” she said.

By 2010 Bristol had reached 60,477.

Donna Osuch, United Way of West Central Connecticut president; Marlo Greponne, director of planning and programs at HRA; Mary Etter, executive director of Bristol Adult Resource Center;

and Larry Covino, supervisor for Bristol Adult Education; all talked about the many ways their agencies use census data to benefit the community.

Osuch also talked about her personal experience with the census, when her first child was due in March of 2000, so she held off completing the census form until he was born. “So Bristol reported a new male, under the age of one, on that 2000 census.”

Mark Plumley, from the U.S. Census Bureau’s regional bureau, said this summer area census offices will open in Hartford, Danbury and New Haven. Those offices will need managers and support staff. To apply, visit usa.census.gov, he said.

The census will especially need people to go out into the neighborhoods to count people, partly this summer, but mostly next year from May to July, he said. “Those individuals will be paid \$21 an hour. It’s a great opportunity for part time work.” To apply, visit 2020Census.gov/fieldjobs.

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