

N.O. throws the gauntlet again on census estimate - '08 population data inaccurate, city says

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Author: Bruce Egger Staff writer

Having successfully challenged the U.S. Census Bureau's estimate of the city's 2007 population, New Orleans has filed a challenge to the bureau's most recent population estimate for the Crescent City.

"As always, it is critically important that New Orleans receive an accurate population estimate," Mayor Ray Nagin said in a statement released Friday by his office.

"A higher population estimate would entitle New Orleans to millions more dollars for mental health services, law enforcement, homeless assistance, services for the elderly and other needed programs."

Nagin's office said New Orleans is challenging the Census Bureau's estimate that the city's population on July 1, 2008, was 311,853.

Using data compiled in collaboration with the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, the city's challenge estimates that New Orleans' 2008 population was between 336,644 and 351,563, representing an increase from 2007 of between 25,000 and 40,000.

The city and the data center reached their estimate by using figures for electrical connections and what the Postal Service considers to be active residences.

Typically, the Census Bureau bases its population estimates on its decennial census counts, adding births, subtracting deaths and noting changes of address from IRS tax returns and Medicare forms. Because many residents do not file taxes or are not legal citizens, this method often leads to inaccurate estimates, Nagin's office said.

"Katrina required us to apply the science of demography to the unprecedented problem of tracking repopulation after a domestic catastrophe," said Allison Plyer, chief demographer at the Community Data Center.

In January, the Census Bureau accepted New Orleans' challenge to the bureau's July 1, 2007, population estimate and adjusted the figure upward by nearly 50,000, from 239,124 to 288,113.

The increase meant an extra \$45.6 million for the city from federal programs that distribute money based on population, Nagin's office said. The higher figure also entitled New Orleans to more money under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the \$787 billion stimulus package passed by Congress this year.

A report released Friday by the Community Data Center says New Orleans' 2008 population was 60.7 percent African-American, compared with 66.7 percent in 2000. The percentages of white, Hispanic and Asian residents all increased, it says.

The percentage of New Orleanians living in poverty fell from 28 percent in 2000 to 23 percent in 2008, the report says.

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Bruce Egger can be reached at begger@timespicayune.com or 504.826.3320.