

## **Guilford at risk of Census undercount**

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GREENSBORO — Guilford County could miss its fair share of state and federal tax money if the U.S. Census can't accurately count all the people who live here.

And in these bad economic times, that's exactly what could happen, according to a report issued Tuesday by the Institute for Southern Studies, a progressive policy research group in Durham.

But the local census office says it's already planning for some of those challenges.

High unemployment, foreclosures and other types of dislocation make it harder for census workers to locate some residents. An accurate count is essential for many federal and state programs.

For each person missed, the state loses \$1,000 in Medicaid funding. Congressional districts, too, are apportioned by population.

Poor people, the unemployed and those with language barriers are less likely to be counted, yet most likely to need services that depend on population numbers.

The research group ranked Guilford 24th in a list of 25 N.C. counties at risk for an undercount.

"The risk factors are magnified (for Guilford) because it's growing so quickly," said Chris Kromm, executive director of the Institute for Southern Studies.

Unemployed people are harder to find if they have moved in with friends or family. Likewise, people who have left a foreclosed house behind may not get a census form.

Some issues are complex and often involve immigrants and poor people. Lower-income people tend to concentrate more residents in one address.

"Having more people in one location increases the chance you're not going to count everybody at one location," he said.

With immigrants, the language barrier and fear of federal immigration agents up the ante. Such groups tend to be more crowded in homes because of low incomes, and because of "language isolation," they are less likely to hear or read public service announcements about the census.

Census workers have a strategy for finding everybody in Guilford and across the nation.

For example, census forms are sent only to addresses, not to specific people. That means anybody living at a home can fill out the form for all the people living there.

"If you are displaced out of 'home A' and you went to live with your in-laws because of foreclosure, then when your in-laws fill out their form you would be included there," said Mike Streeter, office manager for the Greensboro census office. "Wherever you're living is where you'll be counted."

Those most severely affected by the economy — the homeless — are also being counted. Census workers in Greensboro started visiting shelters and service providers for the homeless Monday to get a count, said Jehan Benton-Clark with Partners Ending Homelessness.

Workers were expected to go out to homeless campsites Tuesday night.

State officials worked with the U.S. Census Bureau to coordinate such counts throughout North Carolina.

The Greensboro office has between 215 and 250 workers in the field area of Guilford, Alamance and Caswell counties now, Streeter said.

Beginning May 1, between 1,200 and 1,400 workers will start going door-to-door to interview people who haven't mailed in their forms.

The census does not report citizenship, and immigration status is never a factor, he said.

"There may be some undocumented people that may be a little apprehensive, and I guess the message would be the personally identifiable information is very safe," Streeter said. "Every census employee is sworn for life to protect the confidentiality."

The penalty for any violation is five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

"We share statistical data but that doesn't identify you and me," Streeter said. "The personal data is not shared with any government agency, no law enforcement agency, immigration, anyone."

*Staff Writer Jennifer Fernandez contributed to this report.*

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