DATE: March 6, 2019
TO: Planning and Development Committee
FROM: Jeff Shaw, Senior Director of Public Policy & Advocacy, The Alliance
RE: H.B. 6563 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A GRANT PROGRAM TO ASSIST MUNICIPALITIES IN
            CENSUS OUTREACH PROGRAMS.

Good afternoon Senator Cassano, Representative McCarthy Vahey, Senator Champagne, Representative Zawistowski and members of the Planning and Development Committee:

My name is Jeff Shaw, Senior Director of Public Policy & Advocacy, of the Connecticut Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide advocacy organization representing nonprofits, with a membership of more than 300 community organizations and associations. Nonprofits deliver essential services to more than half a million people each year and employ almost 14% of Connecticut's workforce.

The Alliance supports H.B. 6563, An Act Establishing a Grant Program to Assist Municipalities in Census Outreach Programs.

H.B. 6563 proposes to establish a grant program to assist local communities in outreach for the decennial United States Census 2020. The legislation seeks to maximize participation efforts in the United States Census 2020 by providing additional resources to municipalities.

Every 10 years, the U.S. Census Bureau undertakes a monumental task of counting all people living in the United States and recording basic information such as age, sex and race. The framers of the Constitution chose population to be the basis for sharing political power, so the goal of each decennial census is to count everyone once in the right place to determine fair representation.

There is a lot at stake in Census 2020. First, Connecticut's Congressional representation is based on population, so if each person is not counted, the population declines (and with other states' populations growing), Connecticut could be in jeopardy of losing a Congressional seat. Second, Connecticut receives more than $7.9 billion per year in federal funds, for health care, education, housing, childcare, food assistance, roads and public works programs. If people are not counted, those dollars will decrease yet the need will remain putting more pressure on local governments and nonprofits to provide those services. Finally, census data is used for planning. Local governments use the census for public safety and emergency preparedness; businesses use census data to decide where to build factories, offices and stores; and developers use the census to build new homes and revitalize old neighborhoods. Even residents use the census to support community initiatives involving legislation, quality-of-life and consumer advocacy.

One of the problems in getting a complete count in 2019 is that there is broad distrust of government and people may be hesitant to give information to government employees. As trusted voices in their communities, nonprofits have the ability to help make sure every person is counted. Nonprofits have volunteers, Board members and other people who donate their time, live in the same community, have relationships with neighborhood leaders, faith-based organizations and agencies that provide services and foster trust for the people they serve. Therefore, we urge the Committee to expand the proposed grant program to allow community nonprofits to be eligible for census outreach grants.

Civic engagement is embedded into the mission and activities of most community nonprofits. Similar to voter registration and education, The Alliance encourages all 169 towns to have a Complete Count Committee, and to invite nonprofits to serve on those committees. Complete Count Committees aim to coordinate census outreach efforts, maximize resources and encourage collaboration among local community leaders. In fact, The Alliance was appointed to the Connecticut Complete Count Committee by Lt. Governor Bysiewicz last month.

All local and state leaders, including nonprofits, have a responsibility to ensure a complete count in Census 2020. Dedicating additional resources for this pursuit is an investment in the future of Connecticut.

Thank you for your time and consideration.