

PBW 1-8/1-14, 2001

# Revised census gives mayors worry and hope

The numbers are in. They were a surprise for the Census Bureau, the nation and the state of Rhode Island. The year 2000 22nd decennial census whose numbers were first revealed to the President by the December 31, 2000 deadline and then to the public, fooled many observers by coming in considerably higher than that previously estimated. This was true for both the nation and the state of Rhode Island.

Monthly estimates of the nation's population done by the Census Bureau are useful and serve as current population figures, compared to numbers gathered almost a decade ago from the 1990 census. But the bureau's estimates may not be as accurate as one would like. For example, the bureau had an estimated national population figure of 274.5 million

on April 1, 2000, the day of the actual census, and now we find that the actual count was 281.4 million, a difference of 2.5 percent but amounting to 6.9 million, a sizable number difference. What was estimated to be an approximately 10 percent increase over 1990 turned out to be a 13.2 percent increase.

Estimates for the state's population proved even more dramatic. Throughout most of the '90s, the bureau in its annual estimates of state population, depicted Rhode Island as having lost population except for the last two years. By July 1, 1999, the last estimate, the bureau had the state down to 990,819, a loss of 12,645 or 1.3 percent, largest of the three states judged to have lost population. At that point things looked bad for the state whose capital city was rated best in the Northeast by

*Money* magazine.

The 2000 census count for the state revealed a discrepancy between an estimated loss from 1990 to 1999 of 12,645 to a gain of 44,855 from 1990 to 2000, a 1.3 percent loss to a 4.5 percent gain or a spread of 5.8 percent, almost twice the national undercount percent discrepancy. You could almost hear the cheers of the state's leaders at these announced results - Rhode Island would be no different from the other states in recording a gain in population and, in fact, a gain greater than five other states.

It should be noted that our own Statewide Planning Program planners had projected a state population of 1,011,960 for the year 2000, an increase, rather than a decrease, of 1.6 percent, more accurate than that of the Census Bureau which had estimated a loss.

Given this undercount by the census, it will be interesting to see how that nearly 45,000 population increase for the state is distributed throughout our 39 cities and towns. Certainly there will be an increase in South (officially Washington) County.

Census counts for cities and towns from the 2000 census will

be released in March. Estimates by the census for 1999 were that all eight of Rhode Island cities lost population, ranging from 1.7 percent for Cranston to 14.9 percent for Newport. The greatest numerical loss for these cities was in Providence with an estimated loss of over 10,000 residents or 6.5 percent.

Mayor Vincent A. Cianci is concerned about this, as most large city mayors are, because most of the 4 million uncouneted residents in 1990 were in cities with large immigrant and minority populations such as Providence.

Since there was an undercount by the census of the state population, it is logical to assume that some of this nearly 45,000 undercount will accrue to our cities and their estimated losses will not be as great or perhaps even show some gains. Given the recurring stories of revitalized cities and more people moving to cities throughout the nation, Providence, America's best city in the Northeast, could be one of those cities to show an increase in its 2000 population as it did in 1990.

Chester E. Smolski is Professor of Geography (retired) at Rhode Island College

## LETTERS POLICY

Providence Business News welcomes letters from its readers on local business or financial issues or personalities. Letters must be signed, include a daytime telephone number and should be no longer than 250 words. Longer letters may be edited for space restrictions. Send to:

Letters to the Editor  
Providence Business news  
300 Richmond Street, Providence, RI 02903  
they may be sent via facsimile to (401) 274-0670