THE CITY OF NEW YORK
CITY HALL
NEW YORK, NY 10007

April 7, 2009

The Honorable Gary Locke
Secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Locke:

We are writing with respect to the Census Bureau's proposed method, announced last summer, of counting legally-married same-sex couples in the 2010 Census. Specifically, the Bureau announced that it will change the response of a self-identified same-sex married couple and report them as "unmarried partners" for the purposes of statistical tabulation. As you know, unlike when the last decennial census was administered in 2000, a growing number of states now permit same-sex marriage including Massachusetts, Connecticut and Iowa, or civil unions, like in Vermont. Although same-sex marriage is not yet authorized in New York State, there are numerous same-sex couples who have been legally united elsewhere and reside in New York City. Accordingly, it is the policy of both New York State and New York City to recognize such marriages and civil unions on an equal basis with the marriages of opposite-sex couples to the maximum extent allowed by law.

Although we understand that federal law may not recognize same-sex marriages for the purposes of administration of federal benefits programs, we do not believe it prevents the Census Bureau from reporting statistics from the forms of self-identifying same-sex couples married under state law, like all married couples. Indeed, as Census officials seek the cooperation of the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) community in ensuring the best possible level of participation in 2010, it is possible that the policy announced last summer could discourage LGBT New Yorkers from fully participating in census efforts.

As a practical matter, it is in the overall public interest to know how many same sex-couples actually report themselves as householder-spouse and how many report themselves as unmarried partners. This is especially true for officials at the state and local level who use federal census data to develop governmental programs and address the needs of various individuals and families in their communities.

We thank you for your attention and for reviewing the implications of this policy to ensure the integrity of the census. To that end, our New York City Census Coordinator, demographers and legal staff would be happy to discuss specific approaches and legal frameworks with your office to allow for the collection of the most accurate data possible through the census and other surveys, including the American Community Survey.

Sincerely,

Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor

Christine C. Quinn
Council Speaker