



September 22, 2017

Chairman Thad Cochran
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member Patrick Leahy
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Richard Shelby
Committee on Appropriations
Subc. on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member Jeanne Shaheen
Committee on Appropriations
Subc. on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran, Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Leahy, and Ranking Member Shaheen:

We represent organizations with vastly different policy orientations. However, we agree that sound public policies that address the complex issues facing our nation must be informed by rigorous, data-driven research. To preserve the integrity of the nation's data infrastructure and the policymaking process that depends upon it, we believe strongly that Congress must robustly fund the Census Bureau this year to ensure it is fully prepared to launch the upcoming decennial census.

As you know, the Census Bureau's funding stream differs from that of other discretionary programs due to its cyclical nature. In the years preceding the launch of the decennial census, the Bureau must significantly ramp up its efforts to prepare for this massive, Constitutionally-mandated, and critically important undertaking. Flat — or near flat — funding of the Bureau in the years leading up to the census is unprecedented and would significantly undercut efforts to conduct an accurate survey.

We are concerned, as we know the Committee is, that the funding level in the fiscal year 2018 Senate Commerce-Justice-Science bill, which is just 3.5 percent above the 2017 level and just 11 percent more than in 2016, is insufficient. At this point in census preparations a decade ago, 2008 funding for the Bureau was 79 percent higher than the 2006 funding level. Increases in the corresponding two-year periods in prior decades were even larger — with a 143 percent rise from 1996 to 1998 and a 135 percent increase from 1986 to 1988.

Although the Senate committee-approved level is slightly higher than the 1.8 percent funding increase the Trump Administration requested, we do not believe the Administration's request reflects the Bureau's full needs as it prepares to hire and train hundreds of thousands of census takers; procure and test the technology they will use in the field; rent field offices; begin outreach

campaigns; finalize address lists for over 100 million homes; and test the methods it will use in order to count every person in the country once and only once, and in the right place.

Shortchanging the census is penny-wise and pound-foolish. Underfunding jeopardizes the Bureau's ability to implement cost-effective new technologies and procedures to (among other things):

- Identify new addresses using new methods such as aerial imagery. Census estimated in 2015 that these methods, if properly tested and implemented, could trim about \$1 billion from the cost of sending Census employees to check these addresses on foot.
- Reuse data that people have already provided to state and federal agencies — for example, to identify which homes are vacant and do not need in-person follow-up visits. Census estimated that the reuse of data could ultimately save \$1.2 billion.
- Help and encourage people to respond to the census online and by phone. These efforts could reduce the cost of in-person follow-ups by roughly \$500 million.
- Use smartphones rather than costly meeting time to give census takers updated route assignments. These and related innovations could save more than \$2 billion.

Underfunding such steps toward modernizing could backfire, costing taxpayers more in the long run. Funding delays and shortfalls in 2017 have already led to the Bureau to scale back some of these efforts to improve cost efficiency.

Shortchanging the census also threatens the quality of the information collected, which in turn, would affect the quality of decisions made by businesses, communities, and governments at all levels. Census data are used in planning new schools, stores, restaurants, highways, home construction, and emergency response measures; allotting congressional seats and redrawing congressional district boundaries; assessing the need for government programs; and allocating federal funds.

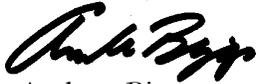
Problems with the census would have even further-reaching consequences, because the census is the statistical foundation of countless smaller surveys conducted annually by the Census Bureau, other agencies, pollsters, medical researchers, and scholars. These surveys rely on the decennial census when choosing how many households to try to interview from each community and how to make those households' responses representative of the state or nation. An inaccurate 2020 census would thus threaten the reliability of local, state, and national survey-based data over the course of the next decade on topics ranging from unemployment to commuting to safety, crime, and health.

No policy or philosophical outlook is well-served by a lack of accurate data. The alternative to accurate, detailed data on American households is policy-by-anecdote, in which lawmakers respond to perceived needs without data needed to determine how large or widespread a problem might be,

where its impacts are most concentrated, and how it may be best addressed. Such a process would spend federal funds neither effectively nor wisely.

For these reasons, we urge you to provide adequate funding for the Census Bureau and the 2020 census.

Yours truly,



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