



November 3, 2014

Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
H-305 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth H.O.B.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey:

As former directors of the U.S. Census Bureau, serving under both Republican and Democratic Administrations, we write to alert you to the urgency of a sufficient “ramp-up” in funding for the Census Bureau in Fiscal Year 2015 (FY2015) and beyond, to ensure that planning for the 2020 Census continues along a sound and timely path.

While the 2020 Census might seem far off, the Census Bureau realistically has little time remaining to lock in design parameters, test and select operational methods, and develop IT systems for collecting and processing census data in preparation for an integrated field test in 2018. 2015 is a pivotal year for decisions that will determine the efficacy of promising, but complex, new initiatives, such as offering multiple response modes, reforming and streamlining field management, and using administrative records and other data sources to update the address list and reduce the number of costly door-to-door visits. These new initiatives show great promise, but they need to be tested thoroughly and in census-like environments to confirm their efficacy.

This fiscal year, the Census Bureau must complete four tests that will inform its selection of the 2020 Census design. Simultaneously, it must begin to develop IT systems, evaluate new questionnaire wording, and assess the accuracy of new counting methods that could save the taxpayer billions of dollars. Cyber-security and privacy concerns are paramount for a modern census that must measure a culturally and linguistically diverse population. While the Census Bureau is committed to fielding the tests on schedule, it will be unable to keep pace with the equally important IT activities and operations development that will make the design work, without the requested ramp-up in funding.

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We are mindful of the difficult fiscal constraints and the legislative options you face as the current Congress draws to a close. While many government agencies can, no doubt, delay decision-points and new initiatives if necessary, the Census Bureau is in a unique position. The Constitution requires a census every ten years in order to reapportion seats in the House of Representatives and to draw new legislative districts based on population; state legislatures depend on census data for these same purposes under their own constitutions. The Census Bureau must follow a robust schedule of research and testing, systems and operational development, and preparations to meet its constitutional obligation and legal deadlines. Preparations for a decennial are complex, with each component related to and built upon previously tested and completed design features. Slippage in the timeliness and thoroughness of planning can have serious consequences for future decisions and the bureau's ability to conduct a cost-effective, accurate census in 2020.

Therefore, we respectfully urge you to allocate the Senate committee-approved funding level for the Census Bureau in FY2015 as soon as possible. We also urge you, if Congress delays final action on FY2015 appropriations past the first fiscal quarter, to create an exception to level-funding for the Census Bureau, so that the full range of testing, systems development, and research activities can move forward on schedule.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

Vincent P. Barabba (1973-1976;
1979-1981)

Bruce Chapman (1981-1983)

Barbara Everitt Bryant (1989-
1993)

Martha Farnsworth Riche (1994-
1998)

Kenneth Prewitt (1998-2001)

Steven H. Murdock (2008-2009)

Robert M. Groves (2009-2012)