



May 30, 2014

Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
S-128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Appropriations
S-146A The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski and Ranking Member Shelby:

The undersigned members of The Census Project write to urge full funding of the U.S. Census Bureau's Fiscal Year 2015 budget request in the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) appropriations bill scheduled for markup next week. We respectfully ask you to reject funding cuts included in the House bill (H.R. 4660), which we believe seriously threaten the Census Bureau's ability to complete research and testing and begin systems and operational development for the 2020 Census in a timely way.

In a May 15 letter to Census Director John Thompson, Senators Tom Carper and Tom Coburn, chairman and ranking member, respectively, of the Census Bureau's oversight committee, expressed concern about the consequences of delays in exploring needed methodological and design reform for the 2020 Census. The senators acknowledged that "recent budget uncertainty, including sequestration... has played a role in the decision to postpone or suspend some research and testing projects," and urged the Census Bureau to select the design framework for 2020 by the end of fiscal year 2015, a decision that already is a year behind schedule.

The House appropriations bill (H.R. 4660) cuts the Census Bureau's budget request by \$238 million, a reduction of 20 percent from the president's request of \$1.2 billion that will have a devastating effect on planning for the 2020 Census at a critical point in the decennial cycle. We believe this reduced funding level will hamper key design decisions that could save more than \$5 billion over the lifecycle cost of the census. We urge your committee to invest now in new methods and systems development that will achieve that goal without sacrificing the quality and accuracy of the census.

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In FY2015, the Census Bureau will: evaluate field tests conducted in 2014; complete initial research and testing, and begin IT infrastructure and operational design development, for the 2020 Census; and prepare for a national test of ACS content improvements. Offering an Internet self-response option, expanding use of administrative records to reduce the cost of nonresponse follow-up, and targeting pre-census address canvassing are three promising innovations that could modernize the census and promise greater cost-efficiencies. The 2015 census field test will focus on reengineering field operations, using administrative records and paradata to streamline the work of census takers — historically the most expensive part of the census.

The ACS, an ongoing part of the decennial census, is an essential test-bed for many promising census methods, serving as a cost-effective alternative to expensive field tests that were a hallmark of previous census planning. Important in its own right, the ACS is an integral part of both private- and public-sector decision-making, ensuring that our nation can meet the needs of its citizens in a fiscally-responsible way, guided by objective, comparable and high-quality socio-economic data for all communities. ***Field tests and the recent Canadian experience have shown that making response to this seminal survey voluntary will lead to dramatically lower response rates, significantly higher costs, and the possible loss of any reliable data for smaller (less populous) geographic areas, including rural counties, small cities, towns, neighborhoods and American Indian reservations. Therefore, we ask you to reject any proposals to make response to the ACS voluntary.***

In response to congressional guidance to minimize response burden, the Census Bureau is conducting a top-to-bottom review of ACS content, to ensure that the survey only gathers data needed to implement federal programs and enforce federal laws and regulations. The review includes examination of questions that respondents find problematic; the bureau is working to improve wording and to revise questions that some might view as objectionable (even though the data are needed to carry out federal programs). Adequate funding in FY2015 will ensure that the Census Bureau completes this important activity in a timely way.

Finally, we draw your attention to a sensible new initiative — the Census Enterprise Data Collection and Processing Initiative — that will replace unique, survey-specific systems with an integrated and standardized Census Bureau-wide system for day-to-day information technology and support needs across all program areas. The requested \$34 million increase for *Data Processing* is an investment that the Census Bureau is likely to recoup many times over in the future.

The Census Project (www.thecensusproject.org) is a long-standing coalition of census stakeholders that includes state and local governments, business and industry, civil rights and labor groups, housing and child advocates, and research organizations that support an accurate and comprehensive census and ACS. We appreciate the difficult decisions your committee must make with respect to funding priorities. ***We are confident that continued investment in new census methods and operations will yield significant lifecycle cost savings, but the window of opportunity to identify and develop the most promising reforms is closing quickly.*** Failure to research and test new methods thoroughly, and to select a design framework and begin major systems acquisitions in FY2015, could increase census costs by billions of dollars and put the accuracy of the nation's largest peacetime activity at risk.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. Census Project Co-Directors Phil Sparks (psparks@ccmc.org), Mary Jo Hoeksema (paaapc@crosslink.net), and Terri Ann Lowenthal (TerriAnn2K@aol.com) would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Barbara Everitt Bryant, Ph.D, Director, Bureau of the Census, 1989-1993
 American Association for Public Opinion Research
 American Association of University Women (AAUW)
 American Planning Association - Florida Chapter
 American Public Health Association
 American Sociological Association
 American Statistical Association
 Arizona Housing Alliance
 Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
 Asian Americans Advancing Justice-AAJC
 Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations
 Association of Population Centers
 Association of Public Data Users (APDU)
 Association of University Business and Economic Researchers (AUBER)
 Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission (Wis.)
 Black Men & Boys Initiative (New Orleans, La.)
 Capital Area Food Bank (Washington, D.C.)
 Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis
 Center for Business and Economic Research, Alabama State Data Center,
 The University of Alabama
 Center for Public Policy Priorities (Texas)
 Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities
 Coalition on Human Needs

Common Cause
Community Action Partnership
Connecticut Housing Coalition
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy
Council for Community and Economic Research (C2ER)
Crescent City Media Group (New Orleans, La.)
Decision Demographics
Demos
Direct Marketing Association
Education Equals Making Community Connections
First Pittsburgh Chapter, National Organization for Women
Greater Minnesota Partnership
Housing Action NH
Housing Consortium of Everett & Snohomish County (Wash.)
Housing Leadership Council of San Mateo County (Calif.)
Human Development Services of Westchester (N.Y.)
Louisiana Housing Alliance
Marketing Research Association (MRA)
Metroplan (Little Rock, Ark.)
Michigan League for Public Policy
Mid-Region Council of Governments (N.M.)
Midwest Political Science Association
Minnesota Council on Foundations
Minnesota Housing Partnership
Minnesota State Demographic Center
Minnesotans for the American Community Survey (MACS)
NAACP
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging
National Association for Business Economics
National Association of Home Builders
National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO)
Educational Fund
National Association of REALTORS®
National Association of Towns and Townships
National Community Land Trust Network
National Employment Law Project
National Housing Conference
National Low Income Housing Coalition
Nazareth Housing Services (Pittsburgh, Pa.)
New Level Community Development Corporation (Tenn.)
North American Association of Central Cancer Registries
PathWays PA
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

Population Association of America
Prison Policy Initiative
Project Vote
Public Justice Center
Ramsey County, Minnesota
Research Advisory Services, Inc. (Phoenix, Ariz.)
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
Ribbon Demographics, LLC
South by North Strategies, Ltd.
South Florida Regional Planning Council
Southeast Michigan Census Council (SEMCC)
Southern Echo, Inc., Jackson, MS
Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium (Wash.)
Tangible Consulting Services
The Community at Holy Family Manor, Inc. (Pittsburgh, Pa.)
Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA)
Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition
Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians