



June 16, 2014

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
522 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Republican Leader  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Reid and Senator McConnell:

The undersigned members of The Census Project<sup>1</sup> write to urge your support for U.S. Census Bureau funding in the FY2015 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) appropriations bill (S. 2437). We believe that any further reductions in funding, beyond the seven percent budget cut already reflected in the Appropriations Committee mark, will 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, and to continue fielding a robust American Community Survey (ACS), the modern version of the census long form. **We ask you to oppose any amendments that would reduce funding for the Census Bureau.**

The decennial census is our nation's largest peacetime activity, mandated by the Constitution as the basis for fair representation in our democratic system of governance. States and counties, cities and school boards, all use census data to establish their political boundaries. Congress relies on decennial census and ACS data to allocate hundreds of billions of dollars annually to the states and localities you represent. For example, many economic development and law enforcement programs funded in the CJS appropriations bill *require* census and ACS data to establish eligibility and determine grant amounts.

Planning for the census requires long-term vision and years of research and development. Congress has directed the Census Bureau to contain the cost

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<sup>1</sup> The Census Project ([www.thecensusproject.org](http://www.thecensusproject.org)) is a long-standing coalition of diverse 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.

of the 2020 Census at the 2010 Census funding level, and the Census Bureau is pursuing fundamental design and operational reforms to accomplish that goal. Proposed innovations include multiple ways to respond, including via the Internet; the use of administrative records to update the master address list and to identify households and persons that do not self-respond; and automation of field operations. *The census is an extraordinarily complex and vast activity. The Census Bureau estimates that these innovations could save \$5 billion, but failure to invest now in thorough research, testing, and systems development will likely **increase** the cost of the census substantially and force the Census Bureau to fall back on outdated counting methods, putting the accuracy of the enumeration in jeopardy.*

In a May 15 letter to Census Director John Thompson, Senators Tom Carper and Tom Coburn, chairman and ranking member 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.

In FY2015, the Census Bureau will: evaluate field tests conducted in 2014; conduct four critical field tests of new procedures and census content, and begin IT infrastructure and operational design development for the 2020 Census; and prepare for a national test of ACS content improvements.

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. ***A Census Bureau field test 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.

We appreciate the difficult decisions the Senate 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.***

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

Sincerely,

American Association for Public Opinion Research  
 American Sociological Association  
 American Statistical Association  
 Apalachee Regional Planning Council (Fla.)  
 Asian Americans Advancing Justice-AAJC  
 Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council (A3PCON)  
 Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations  
 Association of Population Centers  
 Association of Public Data Users (APDU)  
 Children's Action Alliance (Ariz.)  
 Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA)  
 Council for Community and Economic Research (C2ER)  
 Decision Demographics  
 Direct Marketing Association  
 Marketing Research Association  
 Mid-Region Council of Governments (N.M.)  
 Midwest Political Science Association  
 Minnesota Council on Foundations  
 Minnesota Housing Partnership  
 Minnesota State Demographic Center  
 NAACP

NALEO Educational Fund  
National Apartment Association  
National Association of REALTORS®  
National Housing Law Project  
National Multifamily Housing Council  
National Women's Law Center  
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children  
Population Association of America  
Prison Policy Initiative  
Public Justice Center  
Ribbon Demographics, LLC  
Southeast Michigan Census Council  
Tangible Consulting Services  
The Jewish Federations of North America  
Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition