



November 9, 2015

Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
S-128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Vice Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
503 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Vice Chairwoman Mikulski:

As you consider final Fiscal Year 2016 agency budgets in accordance with the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015, the undersigned members of The Census Project¹ urge you to increase funding for the **2020 Census** and related **American Community Survey (ACS)**, both of which were dangerously underfunded in the House and Senate Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bills earlier this year.

Failure to provide a funding level for decennial census planning that is much closer to the President's request of \$663 million could cost taxpayers billions of dollars, as the Census Bureau falls back on more costly but "tried and true" counting methods, rather than implementing more cost-effective methods that haven't been fully researched and tested. The bureau cannot meet the congressional goal of conducting the 2020 Census for less than the 2010 Census without adequate investment in final research, testing and development of sweeping design reforms, to ensure operational feasibility while maintaining accuracy.

Equally troubling, the Census Bureau would be forced to cut the ACS sample size under the 20 percent budget cut the House proposed, leaving small communities (such as towns and neighborhoods), rural and remote areas, and American Indian reservations, as well as smaller population groups (such as race and ethnic subgroups, people with disabilities, and veterans,) with less reliable data to inform decision-making and guide public and private resource allocations.

The President's request of \$1.5 billion for the Census Bureau in FY2016 included \$1.22 billion for Periodic Censuses and Programs, which covers (in part) the 2020 Census and the ACS. The House Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill (H.R. 2578) allocated only \$730.7 million for the Periodics account, *less than* the FY2015 funding level, at a time when decennial census activities must ramp-up considerably to keep planning and preparations on schedule. In its report accompanying H.R.

¹ The Census Project (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 and professional organizations that support an accurate and comprehensive census and ACS.

2578, the Appropriations Committee capped spending on the 2020 Census at \$400 million (compared to the request of \$663 million), a figure that presumably would be even lower in light of floor amendments that cut an additional \$117 million from Periodics. The report also capped ACS spending at \$200 million, \$57 million below the request and roughly \$42 million below the level needed to preserve the current ACS sample size. The Senate Appropriations Committee bill, while more generous, still allocates \$358 million less than the President requested for the Periodics account (\$1.22 billion), putting at risk the Census Bureau's ability to conduct the full range of planning and development activities needed to ensure a cost-effective and accurate census.

FY2016 is a critical year in the 2020 Census cycle. The Census Bureau will conduct two pivotal Census Tests (in Los Angeles County and Harris County, TX) to evaluate and refine the sweeping reforms laid out in the 2020 Census Operational Plan (released October 6th). While the new plan would reduce costs, the Census Bureau must still demonstrate that new methods and operations will produce an accurate count in all communities and for all population groups, especially those that are historically "hard to count." Significant research and development activities that will inform key decisions must take place before the start of the 2018 End-to-End Test in late summer 2017. These activities include:

- Continued research on the quality of administrative records for use during Nonresponse Follow-up.
- Ongoing "in-office" review and updating of the Master Address File, to ensure an accurate framework for the enumeration and allow for only targeted "in-field" address canvassing in 2019.
- Awarding a contract for a comprehensive, nimble communications plan to help boost self-response.
- Developing a language assistance program, with accurate translations and culturally sensitive messages, and robust Partnership Program.
- Develop procedures for the enumeration of group quarters (e.g. prisons, military barracks, nursing homes, and college dorms) and of people without a usual residence (e.g. homeless shelters).
- Finalize questionnaire content, including revised questions on race and ethnicity, and residence rules governing where people are counted.
- Build-out (from the current prototype) the IT architecture that will support all 2020 Census operations, from address canvassing, to self-response, to door-to-door visits to unresponsive households.

Without adequate funding in FY2016, the Census Bureau would be forced to delay, curtail, or even cancel key planning and development activities that bear directly on its ability to conduct an accurate 2020 census and reduce the historic, disproportionate undercount of rural and low-income residents, people of color, immigrants, and young children. *With the window of opportunity to finalize and develop the 2020 Census design closing fast, Congress must provide a ramp-up in funding to ensure that planning and preparations are comprehensive, scientifically robust, and on-schedule.*

Finally, we strongly urge conferees to reject language passed by the House (voice vote) that would make response to the American Community Survey voluntary. A congressionally mandated 2003 field test, as well as Canada's recent experience with a voluntary census long form, confirm that the consequences of voluntary response would be disastrous, with plummeting response rates, soaring costs, and loss of reliable data for smaller communities, neighborhoods, and small population groups. (In fact, Canada just restored its mandatory census long form, after the voluntary survey in 2011 failed

to produce reliable data for small and rural communities and some key socio-economic indicators.) The Census Bureau is working hard to reduce respondent burden and streamline data collection methods in the ACS, while still meeting congressional, state and local, and private sector needs for high-quality, comprehensive data.

In closing, we urge your committee to fully fund the President's budget request of \$1.5 billion for the U.S. Census Bureau, including \$663 million for the 2020 Census and \$257 million for the American Community Survey, in the final FY2016 Omnibus Appropriations bill. Please feel free to contact one of our co-directors (Mary Jo Hoeksema maryjo@popassoc.org; Terri Ann Lowenthal TerriAnn2K@aol.com; or Phil Sparks psparks@ccmc.org) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

American Planning Association
 American Sociological Association
 American Statistical Association
 Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
 Asian American Psychological Association
 Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
 Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations
 Association of Population Centers
 Association of Public Data Users
 Center for APA Women
 Consortium of Social Science Associations
 Council for Community and Economic Research
 Decision Demographics
 Demos
 Korean American Resource and Cultural Center (Chicago, IL)
 Korean Resource Center (Los Angeles and Orange County, CA)
 MACS - Minnesotans for the American Community Survey
 Marketing Research Association
 NAACP
 NALEO Educational Fund
 National Apartment Association
 National Council of Asian Pacific Americans
 National Institute for Latino Policy
 National Korean American Service and Education Consortium
 National Multifamily Housing Council
 National Women's Law Center
 Nielsen
 Population Association of America
 Prison Policy Initiative
 Southeast Michigan Census Council
 Southern Echo, Inc. (Jackson, MS)
 State Voices
 The Jewish Federations of North America