Dear Chairman Culberson and Acting Ranking Member Honda:

We write to express our strong support for the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2017 funding request of $1.634 billion for the U.S. Census Bureau. We urge your subcommittee to fully fund the request of $778 million for 2020 Census planning and $251.1 million for the related American Community Survey.

Congress directed the Census Bureau to keep the cost of the 2020 Census equal to or less than the cost of the 2010 Census. In order to achieve that goal, the Census Bureau is exploring significant reforms to the Census process that would reduce costs and improve accuracy. Developing these new initiatives requires sufficient planning funds. The Bureau is conducting research and operational development on new data collection technology that could save more than $5 billion over the lifecycle of the Census. Failure to invest in planning and preparation could leave the Census Bureau with no choice but to use traditional counting methods that are expensive and less accurate. Unfortunately, preparations have already been delayed due to budget shortfalls.

This is a critical year of preparation to successfully execute the 2020 Census. In FY2017, the Census Bureau must complete production of interoperable systems to implement a re-designed Census. Some key milestones that must be achieved include starting the Local Update of Census Addresses program in partnership with state and local governments, finalizing questionnaire content and submitting it to Congress, and acquiring Regional Census Centers. Additionally, the Bureau is preparing to perform an End-to-End Readiness test in 2018, requiring completion of the new IT systems.

Beyond preparing for the Census, the Bureau is charged with the important task of managing the American Community Survey (ACS) each year. The importance of the ACS cannot be overstated; it provides Congress, state and local governments, businesses, and social service providers with the objective, reliable data they need to invest wisely, stimulate economic growth, and meet the needs of vulnerable populations like veterans, people with disabilities, older Americans, and low income households.

In 2005 Congress supported development of the ACS as a replacement for the decennial Census long form. Today the ACS is the only source of annually updated demographic, social, and economic data for every community in the nation. The modest funding increase requested for the ACS will support continued efforts to improve the ease of responding and the overall experience.
for our constituents and businesses and ensure data quality. Cuts to the ACS budget could mean many U.S. counties and all rural and small communities go uncounted, leaving these areas without sufficient data to guide planning decisions, resource allocation, and initiatives to attract new business investment. Our most vulnerable communities cannot afford cuts to the ACS.

The decennial Census is the nation’s largest peacetime activity and the foundation of our representative system of governance, from Congress down to local school boards. Congress itself relies on Census and ACS data to allocate, prudently and fairly, most federal discretionary funding to the communities we represent. The Census must be a budget priority for Congress. We cannot continue to shortchange an activity so fundamental to our democracy and the sustained well-being of our communities.

Thank you for considering our views on the Census Bureau’s FY2017 budget. We appreciate the challenges your committee faces and look forward to working with you to craft a FY2017 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill that supports the Census Bureau’s vital activities.

Sincerely,

CAROLYN B. MALONEY  GERALD E. CONNOLLY  KEITH ELLISON
Member of Congress  Member of Congress  Member of Congress

EARL BLUMENAUER  MATT CARTWRIGHT
Member of Congress  Member of Congress

WM. LACY CLAY  JAMES P. McGOVERN
Member of Congress  Member of Congress

FILEMON VELA  MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress  Member of Congress

JOYCE BEATTY  MARK POCAN
Member of Congress  Member of Congress
SHEILA JACKSON LEE
Member of Congress

RAÚL M. GRIJALVA
Member of Congress

ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON
Member of Congress

FREDERICA S. WILSON
Member of Congress

JOHN P. SARBANES
Member of Congress

JANICE D. SCHAKOWSKY
Member of Congress

BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN
Member of Congress

STEVE COHEN
Member of Congress

DANNY K. DAVIS
Member of Congress

RUBÉN HINOJOSA
Member of Congress

MARK TAKAI
Member of Congress

SANDER M. LEVIN
Member of Congress

LOUISE M. SLAUGHTER
Member of Congress

DONNA F. EDWARDS
Member of Congress

DONALD S. BEYER, JR.
Member of Congress

YVETTE D. CLARKE
Member of Congress
TONY CARDENAS
Member of Congress

ALMA S. ADAMS, Ph.D.
Member of Congress

ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS
Member of Congress

ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT
Member of Congress

EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON
Member of Congress

COLLIN C. PETERSON
Member of Congress

JIM COSTA
Member of Congress

JANICE HAHN
Member of Congress

LINDA T. SÁNCHEZ
Member of Congress

BARBARA LEE
Member of Congress

NORMA J. TORRES
Member of Congress

JOSEPH CROWLEY
Member of Congress

BETO O’ROURKE
Member of Congress

ROSA L. DeLAURO
Member of Congress

LORETTA SANCHEZ
Member of Congress

GRACE F. NAPOLITANO
Member of Congress
TED LIEU  
Member of Congress

STEPHEN F. LYNCH  
Member of Congress

MARC A. VEASEY  
Member of Congress

KATHY CASTOR  
Member of Congress

AMI BERA  
Member of Congress

DONALD M. PAYNE, JR.  
Member of Congress

CHRIS VAN HOLLEN  
Member of Congress

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM  
Member of Congress

KURT SCHRADER  
Member of Congress

ADAM B. SCHIFF  
Member of Congress

MARK DeSAULNIER  
Member of Congress