

CENSUS BUREAU

FY2013 APPROPRIATIONS HOUSE & SENATE COMMITTEE MARKS

TALKING POINTS

The House and Senate Committees on Appropriations approved their respective versions of the Fiscal Year 2013 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bills in April 2012. The Census Project has reviewed both bills and accompanying report language and offers the comments below.

Senate bill (S. 2323; S. Rpt. 112-158)

- Census stakeholders appreciate the Senate committee's effort to fully fund Census Bureau programs in FY2013, representing a modest 3% increase over the agency's FY2012 request. But we remain concerned about the continued transfer of funds (\$17M) from the Working Capital Fund to meet the President's request and pay for core programs.
- The committee's directive to conduct the 2020 Census for less than the 2010 Census and possibly as little as the 2000 count is *unrealistic and could significantly affect the Census Bureau's ability to enumerate historically hard-to-count groups — including people of color, immigrants, the poor, young children, and rural residents — accurately.*
- We agree that the Census Bureau must take bold steps to contain census costs, but setting a *cap* on the cost of the 2020 Census could force the agency to *cut corners* in research and testing and, more alarming, *stop efforts to count some communities thoroughly during the census itself.*
- The Census Bureau already is testing an Internet response option for 2020, which previous testing shows holds some promise to boost response and, thus, reduce costs. Earlier testing showed a modest, but not substantial, gain in initial response with an Internet option, suggesting that further testing is needed to determine realistically the degree to which electronic options could reduce census costs. An internet response option could leave some Americans, especially senior citizens, vulnerable to *phishing schemes* appearing to be from the Census Bureau. Congress also must recognize that a *digital divide persists*, one that could make it more difficult for minority, rural, disabled, poor, and less educated residents to respond electronically. (*Exploring the Digital Nation: Computer and Internet Use at Home*, U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration and NIST, November 2011)
- The committee's directive to limit use of the Census Bureau's [Working Capital Fund](#) to reimbursable work for other federal agencies (currently about 50% of the WCF) would *materially change the way the Bureau pays for all programs and data products*, potentially reducing its ability to recruit top-flight managers, communicate effectively with stakeholders, maintain data security protocols, and improve its budgeting process. The GAO itself, while suggesting improvements in operation of the WCF, agreed with the Bureau's practice of building a reserve for 'overhead' costs to accommodate the highly cyclical nature of its work. *The authorizing committees should hold hearings on the consequences of depriving the Census Bureau of the WCF for all of its direct activities before Congress makes such a drastic change in the agency's budgetary procedures.*

House bill (H.R. 5326; S. Rpt. 112-463)

- We understand the committee's desire to have more information on ways the Census Bureau will reduce the cost of the 2020 Census by increasing response rates. But the proposed significant cut of \$92 million from the agency's budget request will make it *harder, not easier*, for the Bureau to provide this information to Congress based on comprehensive research and testing in the decade's early years.
- The committee's directive to conduct the 2020 Census for no more than the 2010 Census does not acknowledge population and housing unit growth, as well as continued diversification, over the decade and *could significantly affect the Census Bureau's ability to enumerate historically hard-to-count groups — including people of color, immigrants, the poor, young children, and rural residents — accurately.*
- We agree that the Census Bureau must take bold steps to contain census costs, but setting a *cap* on the cost of the 2020 Census is unprecedented in recent history and could force the agency to *cut corners* in research and testing and, more alarming, *stop efforts to count some communities thoroughly during the census itself.*
- The \$20 million cut to the budget request for the [2012 Economic Census](#) appears to be based on a *misunderstanding* of the census cycle. The Census Bureau's request takes into account the schedule for preparing and mailing census packages, the timing of responses, and plans for data tabulation and analysis. The significant budget cut *could affect the scope of this vital benchmark of our nation's economic health and progress, possibly resulting in a cutback of related add-on surveys of veteran-, minority-, and women-owned businesses.*