

March 24, 2015

Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice
Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
S-128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Vice Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
S-146A The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Shelby and Vice Chairwoman Mikulski:

As you consider federal agency funding for Fiscal Year 2016, we respectfully urge your support for the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), a unique program that is central to our ability, as business leaders, to promote economic development and growth and guide the prudent investment of resources in the communities we serve.

The ACS replaced the census "long form" in 2005 with the support of Congress, to provide more timely information about social and economic conditions and to streamline the once-a-decade population count. The collection of useful data about the nation's economic activity and social progress has been a mandatory part of the decennial census since the first enumeration in 1790, fulfilling James Madison's vision of "adapt[ing] the public measures to the particular circumstances of the community," to enable "the legislature... to make a proper provision for the agricultural, commercial and manufacturing interests" through the census.

ACS data are required to implement federal laws and allocate federal program funds, but they also are an irreplaceable tool for business, industry, and our local government partners in virtually every American community. There simply is no other source of high-quality, detailed socio-economic information that is comparable across time and geography, allowing us to analyze current and trending markets and community needs and to plan future investments accordingly.

Business and industry rely on accurate, comprehensive census and ACS data to spur economic development, sustain and create jobs, revitalize communities, allocate resources, invest wisely, compete globally, provide value to customers, develop strategy, guide operations, and more. In fact, the broad range of Census Bureau data — including from the decennial census, ACS, and economic surveys — are the foundation for sound decisions that strengthen the private sector's role as an economic engine vital to thriving communities.

Census and ACS data provide an important competitive advantage for U.S. markets. Here are just a few examples of how Chambers of Commerce use the data in their everyday work:

- The Greater Houston Partnership uses ACS data on labor force skills and education levels, and on local commuting patterns that could affect future employees, to attract new companies from across the country and globe.
- The Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce uses ACS data to develop its annual Business Vitality Index, to make valid comparisons with other benchmark markets and attract new investment and businesses to the area.
- The Tulsa Chamber of Commerce attracted a \$180 million Macy's distribution center providing 2,500 year-round jobs and 1,000 seasonal jobs by leveraging ACS data about the quality of the local labor force.
- The Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce uses ACS data as an integral part of its Vital Signs report, an annual presentation of indicators to regional leaders and the public, for the purpose of informing actionable policy solutions.

The Census Bureau's request of \$257 million for the ACS is a modest increase of \$15 million over current year funding. In FY2016, the Census Bureau will continue to implement improvements to the ACS, including ways to reduce respondent burden and strengthen the quality and usefulness of data products. Likewise, full funding for 2020 Census planning is important to ensure an accurate enumeration at the neighborhood level for our increasingly diverse communities.

We also believe that making response to the ACS voluntary would greatly diminish the reliability and availability of ACS data for all communities, especially smaller jurisdictions and rural areas. The recent Canadian experience with a voluntary census long form resulted in poor quality data, higher costs, increased respondent burden, and a lack of data for less populous areas. American decision-makers and communities deserve better.

Thank you for considering our views as you make difficult decisions about how to allocate resources in the Commerce, Justice, and Science appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

Austin TX Chamber of Commerce
Buffalo Niagara Partnership
Charles County Maryland Department of Economic Development
Charleston SC Area Chamber of Commerce
Fayetteville Arkansas Chamber of Commerce
Greater Des Moines Partnership

Greater Houston Partnership
Greater Louisville Inc.
Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce
Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce
Greater Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce
Mason City Iowa Chamber of Commerce
Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce
Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce
Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce
St. Louis Regional Chamber of Commerce
Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber of Commerce
The State Chamber of Oklahoma Research Foundation
Tucson Metro Chamber of Commerce
Tulsa Regional Chamber of Commerce
Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber of Commerce