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Major Business Groups Urge Congress to Preserve Census Bureau's American Community Survey

WASHINGTON—Major business groups from across the country are urging support for the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS, the modern version of the census 'long form'), to "promote economic development and growth." Business and industry support for the ACS comes as Congress prepares to consider FY 2016 funding bills. The U.S. House of Representatives has voted twice during past appropriations cycles to make response to the ACS voluntary and once to eliminate the survey altogether.

In [a letter to congressional leaders](#), a roster of 21 influential organizations — including the National Association of Realtors, the National Association of Home Builders, the International Council of Shopping Centers, the National Restaurant Association and the National Automobile Dealers Association — declared, "The ACS is vitally important to business and industry in this country. We use the ACS data to make decisions on a daily basis concerning the availability of qualified workers and the need for job training programs, the need for new plants, stores and other places of business."

The ACS is [the nation's only source](#) of comparable (across geography), consistent (across time), timely (updated annually), high quality demographic and socio-economic data for all communities in the country. It replaced the sample census form in 2005, at the urging of Congress. Because the ACS is part of the constitutionally mandated census, response is required by law (13 U.S.C. §214) to encourage participation, maintain high

response rates and control costs. The accuracy and availability of the data for all communities of all sizes depends on it.

In [a separate letter to Congress](#), 20 regional and local chambers of commerce in cities such as Charleston, S.C., Houston, Louisville, Ky., and St. Louis, business leaders explained that, "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."

Both letters noted that Census Bureau data, including the decennial census, the ACS and economic surveys produced by the federal government, are "the foundation for sound decisions that strengthen the private sector's role as an economic engine to thriving communities."

In two of the previous three years, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to make participation in the ACS voluntary rather than mandatory. The U.S. Senate blocked that action both times.

"Making response to the ACS voluntary would diminish the quality of the vital data it yields. The cost of maintaining sufficient standards of accuracy for ACS data if response were voluntary is significant. A 2003 report to Congress concluded that accuracy would drop dramatically and an analysis found that costs would jump \$90-\$100 million per year if response were no longer mandatory," said the letter from 21 business organizations.

The Census Project is a broad, nonpartisan coalition of census stakeholders — including business and industry; state and local governments; civil rights advocates; researchers and academics; children, family and housing advocates; educators; and other data users — that works to educate policymakers about the importance of an accurate decennial census and robust American Community Survey.

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