

For Release
Friday, October 21, 2016

For More Information Contact:
Phil Sparks: (703) 548-9371, psparks@ccmc.org

Congress Needs to Fully Fund Planning for Next Decennial Census

WASHINGTON—Because of the continuing resolution funding the federal government at FY 2016 levels, the Census Bureau is currently \$180 million under budget for 2020 Census planning in FY2017, while the companion American Community Survey (ACS) is \$21 million under budget, according to [a letter](#) from the nonpartisan, multi-sector Census Project. Budget uncertainties for the fiscal year that started October 1st forced the bureau this week to cancel a large portion of field tests planned for 2017 on American Indian reservations and tribal lands and in Puerto Rico; the test included the only planned evaluation of special counting methods used in rural, remote, and other communities with inconsistent mail service or nontraditional addressing.

Funding shortfalls “will jeopardize implementation of a modern, cost-effective and accurate 2020 Census and a robust ACS,” said a letter from the Census Project to the [House](#) and [Senate](#) appropriations committees. While neither the House nor Senate passed the FY2017 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill, which covers the Census Bureau, committee negotiators are working now to finalize agency funding levels, possibly in an omnibus bill, before the temporary budget measure runs out on December 9.

[The Census Project](#) is a longstanding coalition of 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. Co-signers of the letter included a diverse range of national and local organizations, including the National Association of Home Builders, the NAACP, the Partnership for American’s Children and the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund.

“Failure to provide a funding level for decennial census planning that is closer to the president’s request could cost taxpayers billions of dollars, as the Census Bureau is forced to fall back on more costly but ‘tried and true’ counting methods. Alternatively, the bureau would have to forge ahead with sweeping operational reforms that have not been fully tested,” the Census Project letter said.

The stakeholders noted that, “In FY 2017, the Census Bureau must make final design decisions in advance of the 2018 End-to-End Census Test, when all systems and operations are integrated in a census-like environment.” Critical activities — beyond the now-canceled site tests — that would be funded by the administration’s request are:

- expanded work to update the master address list and spatial (mapping) information using new, cost-effective methods;
- build-out of all IT systems in time for the End-to-End Test;
- a National Sample Test of 80,000 households to evaluate non-ID Internet responses, a Spanish language Internet response option, a new telephone questionnaire assistance and response option, and a Cloud environment for data storage;
- submission of 2020 Census and ACS topics to Congress by April 1, 2017, as required by law;
- further refinement and final decisions on 2020 Census question wording, including a revised question on race and ethnicity; and
- development of the Integrated Communications Campaign and Partnership Program, with a focus on market segmentation and overall planning.

The Census Project letter noted the tight timetable for completing 2020 Census planning and the lack of flexibility in the schedule leading up to the next population count. “The Census Bureau cannot implement these activities in a thorough and timely way without sufficient funding in FY 2017. Equally important, it cannot reclaim lost time and compensate for reduced scope of final tests and early preparations at this point in the cycle,” the letter emphasized.

###