Dear Chairman Culberson and Ranking Member Serrano,

As you consider appropriations for fiscal year 2019, we respectfully urge you to provide at least $4.239 billion in funding to the U.S. Census Bureau. This amount is $438 million above the Administration’s FY2019 request of $3.801 billion for the Bureau and reflects the level stated in the Department of Commerce’s revised FY2019 cost estimate for the 2020 Census. As you know, FY2019 marks the peak operations for the 2020 Decennial Census as the Bureau opens forty field offices, conducts in-field address canvassing, and forms partnerships with local communities to help increase response rates.

The decennial census is a cornerstone of our constitutional system of government. It is used to apportion seats in the House of Representatives, define state legislature districts, and determine school district assignments. Census data helps the private sector make sound investments by identifying unsaturated or emerging growth markets and developing business plans and loan applications. The data also helps Congress make decisions on how distribute over $44 billion in federal funding including, homeland security grants, funding for first responders, special-education and rural business enterprise grants, and other programs key to the American economy.

The 2020 Census is expected to be the largest and most digitally advanced census ever conducted, embracing new technology and data collection that could save more than $5 billion over the lifecycle of the census. Unfortunately, a lack of adequate funding in previous fiscal years has already forced the Census Bureau to cancel tests of field operations in several locations, delay development and testing of critical information technology systems, and reduce the scope of the 2018 end-to-end test.

In addition to field operations, appropriating sufficient funding in FY2019 is critical to ensuring that critical information technology systems are tested and ready for use during the 2020 Decennial Census. Failing to do so could cost taxpayers billions of dollars, as the Census Bureau could be forced to revert to a paper and pencil census that threatens both cost effectiveness and accuracy.

Funding for FY2019 is critical to ensuring system readiness for the 2020 Census and completing the list of residential addresses that will allow the Census Bureau to know where housing units are located throughout the country. Adequate funding is essential to ensure the proper integration of the 44 IT systems the Census Bureau plans to deploy for the 2020 Census. If any of the systems fail or do not integrate properly, decennial operations may be disrupted, costs could rise, data could be lost, and data quality could be compromised.
Funding above the Administration’s request is also needed to ensure that the Bureau will not cut corners in conducting in-field address canvassing, in which approximately 76,000 people will go into communities to ensure that the Census Bureau has a complete list of all residential addresses and that the 2020 Census reaches all housing units in all localities.

Finally, in FY2019, the Census Bureau will finalize and print all materials that will be mailed to households for the 2020 Census. If the Census Bureau does not receive adequate funding for FY2019 and is not able to complete these activities, this or other preparations for the 2020 Census may be delayed and the quality of the 2020 Census will suffer.

Thank you for considering our views on this important matter. While we recognize and appreciate the challenges your Committee faces in drafting this legislation, we strongly urge you to provide robust funding for the U.S. Census Bureau so that it may fulfill its Constitutional mandate effectively and accurately.

Sincerely,

Gerald E. Conelly
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

Keith Ellison
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress

Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman
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Elijah E. Cummings
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Jim Costa
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Barbara Lee
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Joe Courtney
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Darren Soto  
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Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress

Wm. Lacy Clay  
Member of Congress