



**The 2020 Census is Already Starting:
Congress Must Fully Fund This Unique Federal Activity
As Soon as Possible to Ensure a Fair and Accurate Count**

October 24, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chair
U.S. House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
U.S. House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Shelby, Senator Leahy, Congresswoman Lowey, and Congresswoman Granger,

The leaders of The Census Project (www.thecensusproject.org), a coalition of over 700 national, state, and local organizations that support funding the decennial census, write to impress upon Congress the urgency of providing full-year funding for the 2020 Census as soon as possible, whether as part of a package of final spending bills, or in a new Continuing Resolution.

As you know, the constitutionally mandated 2020 Census will shortly be in full swing. Only a few months after the current FY 2020 Continuing Resolution (CR) (P.L. 116-59) expires, most U.S. households will have received their 2020 Census forms. The census year has already begun and important final steps— from recruiting and screening staff, to verifying addresses, to finalizing outreach and advertising plans — are already underway.

We appreciate that the current CR gave the Census Bureau the authority to spend at a faster rate for 2020 Census activities than normally allowed under a CR (with approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)). However, an accurate count requires **sufficient, on-time** resources. The Census Bureau must have the **certainty of full funding for the decennial census now**, so that it can commit sufficient resources for final preparations, major operations, and expanded activities targeting hard-to-count communities, without concern that its funding may fall short of need. **Therefore, in the event a second CR is necessary, we urge Congress to include a full year appropriation of no less than the Senate committee-reported amount of \$6.7 billion for the 2020 Census. Preferably, the Senate will soon consider and pass a full year FY 2020 Appropriation for the Department of Commerce which will provide the Census Bureau with all it needs.**

Without funding certainty, the Census Bureau could be forced to decide it must curtail certain important activities — from outreach and advertising to cyber-security steps to hiring a full complement of census field staff — to prevent a funding shortfall later in the fiscal year. All major components of the census are equally important to assuring an accurate count, and the Bureau can't confirm the scope and carry out each operation in a timely way unless it knows how much money it will have for the full fiscal year.

Further, sufficient, timely funding is critical to the Census Bureau's capacity to address threats that could undermine an accurate count — such as natural disasters, cyber-attacks, IT failures, disinformation campaigns, and low self-response (a significant risk given the first-time nature of the online portal and political controversies, which have diminished trust in the census in some communities). Full funding allows the Census Bureau to reduce the risk of some of these threats, have plans ready to execute if these threats materialize, and execute those plans quickly if necessary. Insufficient resources — or uncertainty about its full-year funding level — will hinder the Bureau's ability to manage risk and counter threats that may arise.

In the previous decennial cycle, when not all full-year appropriations bills were completed on time at the start of FY 2010, Congress provided the Census Bureau with a full-year funding anomaly for its Periodic Censuses and Programs account in the first Continuing Resolution. We urge you to give the Census Bureau the same authority for 2020, should it be included in a new CR.

In sum, we are concerned about the timing of the census funding, which is so critically important at this stage of the 2020 Census. The Census Bureau cannot make up for lost time during final census preparations and implementation, as it works between two hard statutory deadlines: Census Day on April 1, 2020; and the December 31, 2020 requirement to deliver the Apportionment Count to the President and Congress. **The window of opportunity to ensure a successful 2020 Census is closing.** As such, we urge Congress to provide the decennial census with no less than the Senate-committee reported amount of \$6.7 billion for the 2020 Census as part of the next CR and certainly in whatever final FY 2020 appropriations measure Congress enacts ultimately.

Thank you for prioritizing the decennial census as your FY 2020 appropriations deliberations continue.

Sincerely,



Mary Jo Hoeksema
Co-director
The Census Project



Howard Fienberg
Co-director
The Census Project

cc The Honorable Mitch McConnell
 The Honorable Charles Schumer
 The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
 The Honorable Steny Hoyer
 The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
 The Honorable Jerry Moran
 The Honorable Jean Shaheen
 The Honorable Jose Serrano
 The Honorable Robert Aderholt