



February 25, 2015

Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
S-128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Vice Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and
Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
S-128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Vice Chairwoman Mikulski:

We write to urge your support for the President's Fiscal Year 2016 budget request of **\$1.5 billion** for the **U.S. Census Bureau's** vital work, especially two (related) core programs that are central to promoting economic growth, guiding the prudent allocation of public and private resources, and sustaining our democratic system of governance: the 2020 decennial census and the American Community Survey (ACS).

The Bureau has requested \$663 million for 2020 Census planning, a significant but necessary increase more than halfway through the decennial census cycle. This fall, the Census Bureau will announce the design framework for the 2020 Census, drawing on results of in-depth research and testing over the past several years. The design decision already is a year behind schedule, due to past budget shortfalls, and the bureau must pivot immediately to the systems and operations development phase of the census, as it prepares to execute that design. New initiatives, including an unprecedented use of technology to collect and process census responses, *could save more than \$5 billion over the lifecycle cost of the census.*

The window of opportunity to "operationalize" a modern census is small, as the Census Bureau prepares for a readiness test in 2018. The agency must complete production of interoperable systems in FY2016 and FY2017 to implement a reengineered census with confidence. Without adequate resources, the bureau is likely to fall back on traditional and far more costly census methods, an outcome that would put the accuracy of the 2020 Census at great risk, given

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401 Ninth Street NW, Suite 450, Washington, DC 20004
202.326.8700

www.TheCensusProject.org

Congress' directive to keep the cost of the next census at the 2010 level.

Concurrently, the Census Bureau must continue to test, refine, and develop other components of a successful decennial enumeration. These essential activities include a robust, flexible communications campaign; effective outreach and promotion strategies for a diverse nation; in-language materials and assistance for limited English proficient households; telephone questionnaire assistance infrastructure; and final questionnaire content and wording.

Also in FY2016, the Census Bureau will continue to test and implement improvements to the ACS, which will reduce respondent burden, improve question wording, and ensure the collection of data to inform important policy considerations. The agency has requested \$257 million for the ACS, a modest increase of \$15 million over current funding. We call your attention, however, to the Administration's proposal to cancel the so-called "3-year ACS estimates," a consequence of the FY2015 budget cut. This annual dataset provides the highest quality demographic and socio-economic estimates available for localities with a population range of 20,000-64,999, including roughly a third of the nation's counties. We urge you to consider funding to restore the 3-year ACS estimates in FY2016, as numerous stakeholders have cited important uses of the data for effective planning and investment decisions that support economic stability and growth.

Finally, we draw your attention to the Geographic Support System Initiative (+\$21.4M), which the Census Bureau must fully develop to ensure an accurate address list and digital mapping system for the 2020 Census. Improvements will reduce census costs significantly by incorporating timely information from government partners and third-party commercial sources in the years leading up to the enumeration, allowing the bureau to target pre-census address canvassing to areas experiencing housing growth or change.

The Census Project (www.thecensusproject.org) represents a broad and diverse group of stakeholders who rely on accurate, timely, and comprehensive Census Bureau data for decision-making and resource allocation in virtually every facet of American society: business and industry; state, local, and tribal government; transportation; housing; education; the labor force; rural economic development; health care; civil rights implementation; and social services for low-income families and children, the elderly, people with disabilities, veterans, and immigrants and refugees. Census Project participants cannot overstate the importance of census and ACS data to the work we all do. Businesses use Census Bureau data to make

decisions on location, hiring, products and services, and capital investments that are key to economic growth and community development. State and local governments rely on the Census Bureau's data to allocate resources, identify communities with special needs, maintain transportation and utility infrastructure, and attract new investment. Equally important, the data are central to our democracy, affecting not only political representation from Congress down to local school boards, but also the prudent allocation of federal aid to states and communities each year.

We recognize the fiscal constraints your committee faces and believe that continued investment in modern census methods and operations will yield significant lifecycle cost savings. Failure to develop production systems through a robust acquisitions process and to refine sweeping operational reforms in FY2016 and beyond will put the accuracy of the 2020 Census at risk and almost certainly drive up costs.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. Census Project Co-Directors Phil Sparks (psparks@ccmc.org), Mary Jo Hoeksema (paaapc@crosslink.net), and Terri Ann Lowenthal (TerriAnn2K@aol.com) would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Prewitt, director, the Future of Scholarly Knowledge @ Columbia University (former director of the U.S. Census Bureau, 1998-2001)

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Council for Affordable and Rural Housing

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Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

Population Association of America
Population Resource Center (Princeton, NJ)
Prison Policy Initiative
Project Vote
Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Coalition
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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
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South Asian American Policy & Research Institute (SAAPRI)
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
South Florida Regional Planning Council
Southeast Michigan Census Council
Southern Echo, Inc. (Jackson, MS)
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