



House FY2016 CJS Appropriations Bill:

Support 2020 Census Planning;

Preserve the American Community Survey (ACS)

Dear Representative:

We, the undersigned coalition of census stakeholders, are writing to express our deep concern about the U.S. Census Bureau's funding level in the FY2016 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill (H.R. 2578), which could derail plans to modernize and reduce the cost of the 2020 Census and jeopardize the availability of reliable social, economic, and housing data for all communities through the related American Community Survey (ACS).

2020 CENSUS: Later this year, the Census Bureau will announce the preliminary operational design for the 2020 Census. Congress has directed the Census Bureau to spend no more on the 2020 Census than it did on the 2010 Census. The bureau is pursuing sweeping reforms to the census process, as it strives both to reduce costs and maintain accuracy. But the bureau *must* fully test and evaluate these modern, but complex, methods to be sure they work well for all communities and population groups. The window of opportunity is closing fast: It must complete production of interoperable systems and supporting activities in time for an end-to-end readiness test in 2018.

Unfortunately, the House CJS bill cuts the Administration's budget request for the Census Bureau by \$387 million. At a time when funding for the constitutionally mandated decennial census should be on a significant "ramp up," the committee bill allocates only a small increase over FY2015. New technologies and data collection methods could **save more than \$5 billion over the lifecycle cost of the census**. But, *failure to invest now in timely development of IT systems and the operational design, a robust communications campaign, final research on question topics and wording, and language and questionnaire assistance activities, would force the Census Bureau to abandon promising reforms and fall back on traditional, costly counting methods, in order to lower the risk of operational failures.*

A project of the Communications Consortium Media Center
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- **We urge you to oppose any amendments that would further reduce funding for the Census Bureau to pay for other programs within the CJS bill.**

American Committee Survey (ACS): ACS data are literally the guide-star for the prudent allocation of more than \$415 billion annually in federal program assistance to states and localities. The ACS provides Congress, state and local governments, businesses, and non-profits with the objective, reliable data they need to invest wisely, stimulate economic and job growth, and meet the needs of vulnerable populations, such as veterans, people with disabilities, older Americans, and low income households. Congress supported development of the ACS ten years ago as a replacement for the decennial census long form; the ACS is now the *only source* of annually updated demographic, social, and economic data for every community in the nation.

H.R. 2578 *cuts* funding for the ACS by almost 20 percent, which could force the Census Bureau to reduce the sample size, *leaving rural and small communities (including American Indian reservations) without annual data to guide planning decisions, resource allocation, and economic development initiatives to attract new business investment.* Also at risk is coverage in the ACS of people in special living situations, such as nursing homes, college housing, military installations, and prisons.

Equally important, **making response to the ACS voluntary would eliminate vital data for rural communities, towns and townships, small counties, and urban neighborhoods.** Congress included questions beyond a simple population count in the *very first census in 1790*, for the express purpose of informing legislative decision-making. Response to the census has been mandatory since that first census, as well, and the ACS is simply the modern version of the traditional census “long form,” designed to produce more timely data to meet the needs of policymakers.

- **We urge you to oppose any efforts to make response to the American Community Survey voluntary, to eliminate the survey, or to further reduce the funding level for the ACS.**

The decennial census is the nation’s largest peacetime activity and foundation of our representative system of governance, from Congress down to local school boards. The census must be a budget priority for Congress and the American people. We cannot continue to shortchange an activity so fundamental to our democracy and sustained well-being of our communities.

Sincerely,

Barbara Everitt Bryant, Director, U.S. Census Bureau, 1989–1993
 Kenneth Prewitt, Director, The Future of Scholarly Knowledge @ Columbia University; Director, U.S. Census Bureau, 1998-2001

A Second Chance, Inc. (Pittsburgh, PA)
 Alameda County Community Food Bank (CA)
 American Association for Public Opinion Research
 American Educational Research Association
 American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees
 American Planning Association
 American Sociological Association
 American Statistical Association
 Arizona Housing Alliance
 Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund
 Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
 Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council
 Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations
 Association of Population Centers
 Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
 Crescent City Media Group (New Orleans, LA)
 Dakota County Office of Planning and Analysis (MN)
 Decision Demographics
 Demos
 Direct Marketing Association
 Education Equals Making Community Connections (TX)
 Families And Children Together (ME)
 Generations United
 Human Development Services of Westchester (NY)
 Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University
 Marketing Research Association
 Metroplan (Little Rock, AR)
 Michigan Alliance of Latinos Moving Towards Advancement
 Mid-Region Council of Governments (Albuquerque, NM)
 Minnesota Housing Finance Agency
 Minnesota State Demographic Center
 Minnesotans for the American Community Survey
 NAACP
 NALEO Educational Fund
 National Apartment Association
 National Association of REALTORS®
 National Association of Towns and Townships
 National Council of Asian Pacific Islander Physicians

National Housing & Rehabilitation Association
National Housing Conference
National Kinship Alliance for Children
National Low Income Housing Coalition
National Multifamily Housing Council
National WIC Association
National Women's Law Center
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
Population Association of America
Population Resource Center
Prison Policy Initiative
Public Justice Center
Punta Gorda Housing Authority (FL)
Research Advisory Services Inc
Ribbon Demographics, LLC
South by North Strategies, Ltd.
South Florida Regional Planning Council
Southeast Michigan Census Council
Southern Echo, Inc. (Jackson, MS)
Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium (WA)
The Community at Holy Family Manor/Nazareth Housing Services
(Pittsburgh, PA)
US Conference of Mayors
Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition