



February 18, 2016

Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
H-305 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth H.O.B.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey:

We write to urge your support for the President’s Fiscal Year 2017 budget request of **\$1.634 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 a strong democracy: the **2020 Census** and the **American Community Survey (ACS)**.

2020 Census: The Bureau has requested **\$778 million for 2020 Census planning**, a reasonable (+\$182 million) but necessary funding “ramp up” as the agency completes development of IT systems and refines major operations in advance of the 2018 End-to-End Readiness Test. Sweeping design reforms — which include an unprecedented use of technology to collect and process census responses, and broad use of administrative records to update the address list and reduce the cost of follow-up with unresponsive households — could *save more than \$5 billion over the lifecycle cost of the census*.

In FY2017, the Census Bureau must complete production of interoperable systems to implement a re-engineered census with confidence. **The greatest risk to implementation of an accurate, cost-effective census, according to the Bureau’s assessment, is a lack of adequate funding to fully evaluate and develop new methods and operations, which would force the Bureau to fall back on outdated, more costly methods.** Congress has directed the Bureau to conduct the 2020 Census for a lower cost than the 2010 Census, a goal the Bureau believes it can meet with sufficient investment in the testing and development phases. Continued robust development of census IT architecture, operations, communications, and field infrastructure will allow the Census Bureau to finalize the 2020 Census design and begin end-of-decade preparations in a timely way.

The 2017 Census Test will evaluate operational plans in “Update/Enumerate” areas, including Tribal lands; there also will be a first-ever site test in Puerto Rico. The Census Bureau must closely manage creation of a broad, nimble communications and partnership program, for which it will award a substantial contract in late FY2016. A flexible, culturally sensitive public education campaign is essential to promote high levels of participation in all communities and cost-effective “self response” whenever possible. Similarly, in partnership with a contractor it will select later this year, the Bureau must ensure successful development of the Census Questionnaire Assistance (CQA) operation, which will answer the public’s questions and, for the first time, allow people to provide their census responses directly by phone. (The CQA system will be tested for the first time in 2017.)

Also in FY2017, in preparation for the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau must:

- Finalize decisions on use of administrative records for Nonresponse Follow-up;
- Conduct a final address canvassing test in two sites, to validate the effectiveness of more cost-effective in-office procedures using government records and third-party (commercial) data;
- Acquire space for six Regional Census Centers;
- Develop in-language materials and assistance for limited English proficient households;
- Submit final questionnaire content to Congress by April 1, 2017, in accordance with Title 13, U.S.C.;
- Start the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) program, required by Title 13, U.S.C., which allows state and local governments to submit address lists and maps to the Census Bureau, thus helping to ensure universal coverage in the census and reducing the scope of costly field address canvassing; and
- Continue staffing and building cyber-security defenses across all systems and operational applications.

We also urge full funding for other activities within the Periodic Censuses and Programs account that directly support decennial census preparations and implementation. The **Geographic Support System Initiative (\$85 million)** will help ensure an accurate address list and digital mapping system for the 2020 Census and reduce costs significantly by incorporating timely information from government partners and third-party commercial sources in the years leading up to the enumeration. The **Census Enterprise Data Collection and Processing system, or CEDCaP (\$92 million)**, will reduce redundancies and “one off” IT solutions in data management. Both of these initiatives will increase cost-efficiencies across all Census Bureau surveys and programs.

American Community Survey: The Census Bureau has requested **\$251.1 million for the ACS**. The nation’s premier survey produces socio-economic and demographic data that are essential for prudent decision-making and resource allocation by Congress, state and local governments, businesses, and nonprofit agencies. The proposed funding level (+\$7.6 million) will allow the Bureau to maintain a valid sample size and continue forward-looking research on new methods and streamlined operations that will reduce respondent burden, improve question wording, and control costs. High-quality ACS data for smaller and less-populous communities (including rural areas, towns, neighborhoods, and American Indian reservations) and smaller population groups (such as persons with disabilities, veterans, and ethnic subgroups) depend on a sufficient sample size.

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.¹ We 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 Census Bureau 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, underpinning not only political representation at all levels of government, but also prudent and fair allocation of federal aid to states and communities each year.

¹ Our coalition includes representatives from many sectors, including business and industry; state, local, and Tribal government; transportation; housing; education; labor; rural economic development; health care; civil rights; and nonprofit agencies helping low-income families and children, the elderly, people with disabilities, veterans, and immigrants and refugees.

In closing, we urge your committee to fully fund the President's FY2017 budget request for the Census Bureau. A steady funding ramp-up for the 2020 Census is necessary to complete production of IT systems and finalize all operations, in preparation for the 2018 readiness test, and to ensure a fair and accurate, cost-effective census. Adequate funding for the ACS will sustain the availability of high-quality data for all U.S. communities and allow the Census Bureau to continue efforts to address congressional concerns about respondent burden and privacy.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. Census Project Co-Director Mary Jo Hoeksema (maryjo@popassoc.org) would be happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Alabama State Data Center, Tuscaloosa, AL
Alameda County Community Food Bank, Oakland, CA
American Educational Research Association
American Sociological Association
American Statistical Association
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-AAJC
Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council
Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations, Chicago, IL
Association of Population Centers
Association of Public Data Users
Campaign for Fair Latino Representation, New York, NY
Community at Holy Family Manor, Pittsburgh, PA
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Cornell Institute for Social and Economic Research, Ithaca, NY
Crescent City Media Group and Open Democracy Project, New Orleans, LA
Demos
Developmental Disabilities Institute, Detroit, MI
Georgia Coalition for the Peoples' Agenda, Atlanta, GA
Gerontological Society of America
Jewish Federations of North America
Latino Census Network, New York, NY
Marketing Research Association
Mid-Region Council of Governments, Albuquerque, NM
Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce, Minneapolis, MN
Minnesota Council on Foundations
Minnesotans for the American Community Survey, Minneapolis, MN
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc.
NALEO Educational Fund
National Association for Business Economics
National Association of Home Builders
National Association of REALTORS®
National Council of Jewish Women
National Institute for Latino Policy, New York, NY
National Low Income Housing Coalition
New York City Department of City Planning

Nielsen
Population Association of America
Prison Policy Initiative
Program on Applied Demographics, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY
Progress Mississippi, Inc., Jackson, MS
Proyecto Azteca, San Juan, TX
Proyecto Juan Diego, Brownsville, TX
Public Justice Center
Research Advisory Services, Inc., Phoenix, AZ
South Asian Americans Leading Together-SAALT
South Florida Regional Council
Southeast Michigan Census Council
Southern Coalition for Social Justice, Durham, NC
Southern Echo, Inc., Jackson, MS
SouthWest Organizing Project, Albuquerque, NM
Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA)
Virginia Civic Engagement Table, Richmond, VA