



The Census Project

July 15, 2013

Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
S-128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Appropriations
S-146A The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Mikulski and Ranking Member Shelby:

As you prepare to mark up the Fiscal Year 2014 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill, we urge you to consider the critical need for adequate Census Bureau funding, especially for 2020 Census planning and the America Community Survey (ACS). Congress has asked the Census Bureau to reduce substantially the overall cost of the next decennial census. To achieve this goal without putting an accurate enumeration at risk, the Census Bureau must invest resources *now* in final research and testing in order to pursue a design option that maximizes cost efficiencies and targets limited resources to hard-to-count population groups, including rural and low-income communities.

The Census Project (www.thecensusproject.org) stakeholders — which include state and local governments, business and industry, civil rights and labor groups, housing and child advocates, health care providers, research organizations, and others — rely on accurate, comprehensive information from the census and ACS for much of our decision-making. The data also are central to our democratic system of governance and guide the prudent allocation of fiscal resources in the public and private sectors.

*While planning for the next census is well underway, insufficient funding in Fiscal Year 2013 will delay important testing milestones and selection of a design framework for 2020. **The Census Bureau has made the hard choices regarding program changes for FY2013, but it cannot maintain a robust planning process with continued budget cuts. The Bureau needs modest but steady annual funding increases leading up to the decennial enumeration, in order to realize significant savings in the lifecycle cost of the census.***

Changes to the 2020 Census research and testing program, attributable to FY2013 budget reductions, include canceling or delaying a number of field tests. The Census Bureau will delay until FY2014 important tests of household contact, pre-registration, and so-called “push” strategies to encourage and facilitate Internet response to the census. While electronic response might seem like an easy “fix” to the growing cost of census-taking, there are numerous challenges the Census Bureau must address and evaluate to ensure the confidentiality of participation via the Internet, maintain public confidence in data security, and avoid duplicate counting while placing each individual in the correct (and precise) geographic location. The Census Bureau also has delayed, until FY2015, a test to evaluate the integration of census processes and systems.

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In addition, a robust ACS is an essential test-bed for many promising census methods, essentially serving as a cost-effective alternative to larger field tests that were a hallmark of previous census planning efforts. Current budget constraints have forced the Census Bureau to delay vital testing of prospective revisions to census questions, which, by law, the bureau must submit to Congress by early 2018.

Both the U.S. Government Accountability Office and the Commerce Department's Inspector General have reported that fundamental reforms to the census design could yield billions of dollars in savings and contain the lifecycle cost of the 2020 Census to \$13-\$18 billion, well below the estimated \$30 billion cost of repeating a design that relies on inefficient or outdated methods used in prior enumerations. *But the Census Bureau must thoroughly evaluate promising new methods and emerging technologies to ensure that new approaches will not diminish the enumeration's accuracy. **We urge you to make the necessary investments now in the planning process, to help reduce costs and maintain accuracy just a few years down the road. Continued delays in selecting a census design framework and starting operational development and systems testing increase the risk of a census that is too expensive, less accurate, or both.***

The decennial census and American Community Survey provide a unique foundation for much of your work as decision-makers and prudent stewards of tax dollars. The President's FY2014 budget request of \$982 million for the Census Bureau is a truly modest investment in objective, reliable data that serves the public good for the benefit of all Americans.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. Please feel free to address any additional questions you may have to Census Project Co-Directors Phil Sparks (psparks@ccmc.org), Mary Jo Hoeksema (paaapc@crosslink.net), or Terri Ann Lowenthal (TerriAnn2K@aol.com).

Sincerely,

American Sociological Association
 American Statistical Association
 Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles
 Asian Americans Advancing Justice-AAJC
 Asian Law Alliance
 Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council
 Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations (AASRO)
 Association of Population Centers
 Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission (Green Bay, WI)
 Carolina Population Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
 Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA)
 Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy
 Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
 Filipino American Service Group, Inc. (FASGI)
 First Pittsburgh Chapter of the National Organization for Women
 Human Development Services of Westchester
 International Children Assistance Network (ICAN)
 Japanese American Citizens League
 Julian Samora Research Institute, East Lansing, MI
 Latino Census Network
 Marketing Research Association
 Michigan Alliance of Latinos Moving toward Advancement (MI ALMA)
 Michigan League for Public Policy
 Minnesota Housing Partnership
 National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund

National Coalition on Black Civic Participation
National Communication Association
National Housing Law Project
National Institute for Latino Policy (NLP)
National WIC Association
Population Association of America
Prison Policy Initiative
Research Allies for Lifelong Learning
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)
South Asian Network
South Florida Regional Planning Council
Southeast Michigan Census Council
Thai Community Development Center
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Union of Pan Asian Communities (UPAC)
Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition (VAHC)