



April 2, 2014

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:

We write to urge your support for the President's Fiscal Year 2015 budget request of **\$1.211 billion** for the **U.S. Census Bureau's** vital work, especially two (related) core programs that are central to spurring economic growth, guiding the prudent allocation of resources, and sustaining our democratic system of governance: the 2020 decennial census and the American Community Survey (ACS). As we approach the middle of the decade, the Census Bureau is poised to make key design decisions that could *save more than \$5 billion over the lifecycle cost of the census*. We believe that Congress must continue to invest now in new methods and systems development that will achieve this goal without sacrificing the quality and accuracy of these premier data programs.

The Census Project (www.thecensusproject.org) is a long-standing coalition of census stakeholders that includes state and local governments, business and industry, civil rights and labor groups, housing and child advocates, and research organizations that support an accurate and comprehensive census and ACS. 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 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.

A project of the Communications Consortium Media Center
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www.TheCensusProject.org

In FY2015, the Census Bureau will: evaluate field tests conducted in 2014; complete initial research and testing, and begin IT infrastructure and operational design development for the 2020 Census; and prepare for a national test of ACS content improvements. Offering an Internet self-response option, expanding use of administrative records to reduce the cost of nonresponse follow-up, and targeting pre-census address canvassing are three promising innovations that could modernize the census and promise greater cost-efficiencies. The 2015 census field test will focus on reengineering field operations, using administrative records and paradata to streamline the work of census takers — historically the most expensive part of the census.

The ACS, an ongoing part of the decennial census, is an essential test-bed for many promising census methods, serving as a cost-effective alternative to expensive field tests that were a hallmark of previous census planning. Important in its own right, the ACS is an integral part of both private- and public-sector decision making, ensuring that our nation can meet the needs of its citizens in a fiscally-responsible way, guided by objective, comparable and high-quality socio-economic data for all communities. In response to congressional guidance to minimize response burden, the Census Bureau is conducting a thorough review of ACS content to ensure that the survey only gathers data needed to implement federal programs and enforce federal laws and regulations. The review includes examination of questions that respondents find problematic; the bureau is working to improve wording and to revise questions that some might view as objectionable (even though the data are needed to carry out federal programs). Adequate funding in FY2015 will ensure that the Census Bureau completes this important activity in a timely way.

Finally, we draw your attention to a sensible new initiative — the Census Enterprise Data Collection and Processing Initiative — that will replace unique, survey-specific systems with an integrated and standardized Census Bureau-wide system for day-to-day information technology and support needs across all program areas. The requested \$34 million increase for *Data Processing* is an investment that the Census Bureau is likely to recoup many times over in the future.

We recognize the fiscal constraints your subcommittee faces and are confident that continued investment in complex, but necessary, reforms to census methods and operations will yield significant lifecycle cost savings. Failure to research and test new methods thoroughly, and to select a design framework and begin major systems acquisitions on time, could increase census costs by billions of dollars and put the accuracy of the nation's largest peacetime activity at risk.

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,

AcademyHealth
 Alameda County Community Food Bank (Calif.)
 American Sociological Association
 American Statistical Association
 Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund
 Asian Americans Advancing Justice-AAJC
 Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations
 Association of Population Centers
 Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities
 Community Action Partnership
 Connecticut Association for Human Services
 Connecticut Voices for Children
 Demos
 Greater Minnesota Partnership
 Housing Consortium of Everett & Snohomish County (Wash.)
 Housing Leadership Council
 Long Island Housing Services, Inc. (N.Y.)
 Maine Children's Alliance
 Marketing Research Association (MRA)
 Massachusetts Law Reform
 Mid-Region Council of Governments (N.M.)
 Midwest Political Science Association
 Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce
 Minnesota Council on Foundations
 Minnesotans for the American Community Survey
 NALEO Educational Fund
 National Association of REALTORS®
 National Association of Towns and Townships
 National Communication Association
 National Council of Asian Pacific Islander Physicians
 National Council of Housing Market Analysts
 National Housing & Rehabilitation Association
 National WIC Association
 Population Association of America
 Population Resource Center
 Prison Policy Initiative

Public Justice Center
Research Advisory Services Inc. (Phoenix, Ariz.)
Ribbon Demographics, LLC
Southeast Michigan Census Council
Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium (Wash.)
Urban and Regional Information Systems Association
Voices for Vermont's Children
ZERO TO THREE