



May 7, 2007

Honorable Alan Mollohan
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science
Committee on Appropriations
H-309 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Mollohan:

We are writing to urge full funding for the U.S. Census Bureau in Fiscal Year 2008, to ensure **comprehensive preparations for the 2010 Census, continued full implementation of the American Community Survey (ACS), and collection of key economic and social data** through other Census Bureau programs. The president's request of **\$1.23 billion** is the minimum needed to ensure that preparations for the nation's largest peacetime undertaking continue on schedule and that other statistics used extensively by policymakers are collected and published in a timely way. **We also encourage you to consider funding to launch the 2010 Census Partnership Program, which the president did not request.**

The undersigned organizations have come together under the umbrella of The Census Project, to educate policymakers and the public about the importance of an accurate and comprehensive census. We represent a wide range of stakeholders who rely on census data to better understand and serve our nation's diverse population and communities.

2008 is a pivotal year on the road to the 2010 Census and for several other data programs. Data collection and tabulation for the 2007 Economic Census and Census of Governments also take place next year. The **Economic Census**, with a proposed budget of **\$128 million**, produces the nation's most comprehensive picture of key industries; the data are widely used to evaluate the health of vital economic sectors and to plan for future growth and stability.

In addition, the Census Bureau is developing the Dynamics of Economic Well-Being System (DEWS) to measure income, wealth and program dynamics – information that helps Congress, researchers and other policymakers evaluate the effectiveness of economic policies and social programs. While the bureau continues to research and plan for this new system, it is critical to **maintain data collection through the current Survey of Income and Program Participation**, to ensure the continued availability of these important measures in the interim.

2010 Census: Preparations Ramp-Up in 2008

2008 is an especially important year in the decennial census cycle, highlighted by the Census Dress Rehearsal in San Joaquin County, CA, and several North Carolina counties. From finalizing the census questionnaire by April 1, to building technical infrastructure, to preparing address lists and maps, the Census Bureau must validate the census design in the field, reach out to partners across the country, pull together the components of the enumeration, and begin laying the groundwork for the conduct of the census.

In 2008, the Census Bureau will finish preparations for and conduct the 2008 Census Dress Rehearsal, a dry-run of the full census process. The dress rehearsal will feature new methods (such as bilingual questionnaires and a targeted replacement mailing), new technologies (including hand-held computers and Global Positioning System software), updated address lists and digital maps, and new strategies for reaching hard-to-count populations. The dress rehearsal provides the only opportunity to test the integrated 2010 plan in a census-like environment.

The census relies on a vast, complex technological infrastructure, and the Census Bureau's contracting partners must continue development of an integrated data capture and processing system, as well as an automated field data collection process, in 2008, both for the dress rehearsal and the census itself. The Census Bureau must finish updating the geographic digital mapping system (TIGER) for the remaining 367 counties, completing a modernization project that will help census takers locate and enumerate households correctly. Equally important, sufficient funding is necessary for the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) program and related address canvassing in 2008. An accurate, comprehensive Master Address File (MAF) is the foundation of an accurate census, and local involvement in developing the MAF is a crucial step toward meeting that goal.

Adequate funding for the census in FY2008 is a wise and necessary investment. Evaluating innovative design features, such as a targeted replacement mailing and GPS-equipped handheld computers for field work, will save hundreds of millions of dollars in the long run and will help ensure a more accurate count in 2010 by reducing operational risk.

Census Reengineering and the American Community Survey

The ACS is one of the most prudent investments the government can make in sound planning and program development and evaluation. ACS data will help public and private sector policymakers track and analyze important trends, such as growing school-age and senior citizen populations, incidence of poverty, availability of affordable housing and access to health insurance, households needing language assistance, and the needs of veterans. The relatively modest investment in this annual survey will allow legislators to target more effectively hundreds of billions of dollars in program funds, and businesses to invest trillions of dollars more prudently, for the betterment of all communities.

The Census Bureau has requested **\$187.2 million for the ACS** in 2008. This amount will ensure the uninterrupted collection of essential information from households and group quarters, moving the survey closer to its goal of producing annual small area data after the first five years of nationwide implementation. Inadequate funding could force the Census Bureau to drop group quarters coverage or reduce sample size, placing a complete transition from the census long form in jeopardy.

Partnerships Will Help Boost Census Participation

While the president's budget request for the Census Bureau appears to be sound, we are concerned about the lack of funds to launch a Partnership Program for the 2010 census. The Census Bureau director testified before your subcommittee that regional partnerships will begin in 2009, but we believe this compressed schedule will not leave adequate time for full and effective development of partnerships, which by all accounts played an important role in boosting census participation in 2000.

Efforts to convince a significant portion of the population to answer the census must be centered at the community level, where local service providers, religious and civic leaders, and elected officials often have far greater influence on people than the federal government. Many factors that contribute to an undercount – language barriers, cultural differences, complex household arrangements, distrust of government, and civic disengagement – can be overcome through a sustained outreach and educational effort on behalf of the census, led by trusted community leaders. This undertaking, however, takes time and planning to realize its full potential. Starting the Partnership Program in 2008 will allow Census Partnership Specialists to begin building critical ties with local leaders that will help recruitment operations in 2008 and 2009 and set the stage for expanded promotion activities in 2009 and 2010.

In closing, we urge you to fully fund the president's request for the Census Bureau, to consider additional funds for the Partnership Program, and to oppose amendments that would reduce the Census Bureau's budget to pay for other programs within the Commerce-Justice-Science appropriations account.

Thank you for your consideration of our views and for your support of adequate funding for important Census Bureau activities.

Sincerely,

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