



The Census Project

April 29, 2008

Chairman Robert C. Byrd
Committee on Appropriations
Capitol Building, S-131
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Byrd:

The Census Project, a coalition of diverse organizations supporting a fair and accurate 2010 decennial census, respectfully urges your immediate support for an **emergency Fiscal Year 2008 (FY2008) supplemental appropriation of no more than \$238 million for the U.S. Census Bureau**. The additional funds will ensure that the Census Bureau can continue uninterrupted and thorough preparations for a modified 2010 census that uses traditional paper-based methods to collect data in the field from unresponsive households.

As you know, the Secretary of Commerce and Census Director told Congress earlier this month that they are abandoning plans to use handheld computers, developed by Harris Corporation, for the most labor-intensive and costly census operation -- non-response follow up (NRFU). The Government Accountability Office has designated the 2010 census as **high risk**, based on concerns about the Bureau's ability to manage large information technology projects and the resulting uncertainty for census operations.

On April 3, Secretary Carlos Gutierrez told the House Committee on Appropriations 3 that reverting to traditional field methods in 2010 would increase the life-cycle cost of the census by as much as \$3 billion. **To begin this transition, the Census Bureau needs an additional \$160 - \$238 million in FY2008 to begin preparing immediately for the redesign.**

The undersigned organizations, representing state and local governments, researchers, civil rights and labor advocates, businesses, and housing and children's interests, are deeply concerned that fundamental changes to the 2010 census design will jeopardize the accuracy of the next population count, especially in historically hard-to-enumerate communities, and

therefore urge the Administration and Congress to provide emergency funding to ensure the most accurate count possible.

The Secretary testified that the Administration would seek permission from Congress to reprogram \$33 million within the Census Bureau, and the remaining amount from current programs within the Commerce Department, to cover the funding increase for the census.

As you know, majority and minority members of the Appropriations Committee have rejected the reprogramming proposal, citing strong support in Congress for the Commerce activities a redistribution of funds would adversely affect.

While we agree with the Secretary that a paper-based NRFU “offers greater flexibility to ensure a successful decennial at this late time in the planning and development cycle,” we also believe that the **2010 census remains extremely vulnerable to operational difficulties and the possibility that the count will be less accurate than the 2000 census.** The Census Bureau and Commerce Department, Harris Corporation, and congressional oversight committees all share some responsibility for failing to recognize and prevent, in a timely way, the failure of planned technological improvements in the census. Nevertheless, **the primary goal going forward must be to ensure that the Census Bureau has the human and fiscal resources it needs to prepare for and successfully carry out a revised census plan only two years from now.** Census preparations must stay on schedule, without any delays or reductions in scope that are likely if Congress and the Administration cannot agree on sources of funding.

The 2000 census offers a recent precedent for designating unanticipated funding for the constitutionally mandated decennial count as an “emergency” under budget guidelines. An incomplete or inaccurate census, with questionable results, could trigger a constitutional crisis similar to the one our country faced after the 1920 enumeration, when Congress refused to accept the results.

We recognize the economic constraints affecting federal budget decisions at this time. We also understand Congress and the Administration have many worthy programs requiring funding from the FY 2008 emergency supplemental appropriations bill. However, a complete and accurate census is fundamental to our democracy. Immediate, additional emergency funding, coupled with strong oversight of final census preparations by the Congress, GAO, and Commerce Department, will help uphold the promise of equal representation embodied in the Constitution and ensure that accurate census

data can continue to guide vital fiscal and policy decisions through the next decade.

Thank you for your consideration of our views and concerns. More information on *The Census Project* and its many participants can be found at www.thecensusproject.org.

Sincerely,

American Sociological Association
American Statistical Association
Arab American Institute Foundation
Asian American Justice Center
Association of Population Centers
City of New York
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
Japanese American Citizens League
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund (MALDEF)
National Association of Counties
National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO)
Educational Fund
National Council of Jewish Women
National Multi Housing Council
Population Association of America
Population Resource Center
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
U.S. Conference of Mayors

Cc The Honorable David Obey
The Honorable Jerry Lewis
The Honorable Thad Cochran
The Honorable Alan Mollohan
The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
The Honorable Richard Shelby
Dr. Katherine Wallman, Office of Management and Budget
Mr. David Connolly, Office of Management and Budget