



# The Census Project

April 28, 2008

Honorable Jim Nussle  
Director  
Office of Management and Budget  
725 17<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Nussle:

*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 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.

Secretary Carlos Gutierrez told the House Committee on Appropriations on April 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.

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, but 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](http://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. Conference of Mayors

Cc The Honorable David Obey  
The Honorable Jerry Lewis  
The Honorable Robert Bryd  
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