



The Census Project

December 11, 2007

The Honorable Robert Byrd, Chairman
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Obey, Chairman
U.S. House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member
U.S. House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Byrd, Senator Cochran, Chairman Obey, and Congressman Lewis:

We are writing to you as members of the Census Project, a collaboration of state and local governments, civil rights and labor groups, housing and child advocates, businesses, and research organizations interested in a fair and accurate Census 2010.

As you draft an omnibus appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2008, we want you to be aware of our support for fully funding the Census Bureau. The Census Bureau is the premier source of demographic and economic data on every facet of our nation's population and communities. The agency produces annual data that are used by federal agencies to determine the allocation of over \$300 billion in federal funding (2007, Brookings Institution) and by the private sector to inform key investment and other business decisions. Further, census population numbers are used to apportion seats in Congress, influencing the foundation of our democracy. To enable the Census Bureau to perform its essential operations and constitutional requirements, we ask that the omnibus bill include the following provisions:

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Provide \$1.266 billion in Fiscal Year 2008

We urge the omnibus bill to reflect the Senate mark on the agency's Salaries and Expenses account, the House mark on the 2010 Decennial Census Program, and the Senate mark on all other programs, including the Economic Census, Census of Governments, Intercensal Demographic Estimates Program, Geographic Programs and Data Processing Systems. Doing so would require a total funding level of \$1.266 billion, a 2.91 percent increase over the President's request.

Provide \$13 million for 2010 Census Partnership Program

The above recommendation includes \$13 million for the Partnership Program, which was funded in the House version of the Commerce, Justice and Science Appropriations bill, but did not appear in the President's budget request. Just as the Bureau must "ramp up" its technical systems to ensure an accurate, fair census, it must also begin educating the public, especially in historically undercounted communities, about the importance of participating in the census. The Partnership Program engages trusted leaders and organizations, from the national to neighborhood level, to help improve the census count among people of color, children and those who speak a language other than English. If the Bureau doesn't receive funding for the program in Fiscal Year 2008, the success of the Partnership Program is jeopardized and valuable time is lost organizing over 140,000 local governments, businesses, community groups, churches and non-profit organizations nationwide.

Strike Internet response and ACS Methods Panel provisions

We ask that the omnibus bill strike language adopted by the Senate that would withhold \$10 million until the Census Bureau reports on plans to make an Internet response option available in the 2010 Census and American Community Survey (ACS). Previous Census Bureau tests of Internet response did not demonstrate cost savings or increased response rates, particularly among the hardest-to-count population groups. Given the uncertain status of census preparations under the Continuing Resolution, the Bureau does not have sufficient time to plan, test and execute this option as part of the 2010 design.

We also ask you to strike language in the Senate report that would restrict funding for the ACS Methods Panel. The agency must be allowed to spend money on the panel if it is to properly test and demonstrate the efficacy of future questions on the ACS.

Provide Funding Exemption for Census Bureau in 3rd CR

We thank you for working with the Administration to provide the Census Bureau with an anomaly in the current Fiscal Year 2008 Continuing Resolution (CR). By exempting the Census Bureau from flat-line funding restrictions, the agency has been able to resume its preparations for the 2008 Census Dress Rehearsal and the ongoing Economic Census and Census of Governments.

We strongly urge you to continue exempting the Census Bureau from flat-line funding requirements of any additional Continuing Resolutions that are necessary, as was done prior to Census 2000 several times. We also hope the accompanying language will give the Census Bureau the flexibility it needs to support continued implementation of its other key survey activities, including the Current Population Survey and the Survey of Income and Program Participation.

Thank you for your attention to these issues and for your support of the Census Bureau and its valuable programs.

Sincerely,

American Statistical Association

Helen Samhan
Arab American Institute Foundation

Asian American Justice Center

Association of Population Centers

Leonard M. Gaines, Ph.D., President
Association of Public Data Users

The City of New York

Japanese American Citizens League

Linda Loubert, Ph.D., Political Economist, Research Associate
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National Association of Counties

Population Association of America

Population Resource Center

Gary Petroni, President
Patricia C. Becker, Executive Director
Southeast Michigan Census Council

Cc: Senator Barbara Mikulski
Senator Richard Shelby
Representative Alan Mollohan
Representative Rodney Frelinghuysen