July 1, 2024

Rep. Hal Rogers, Chairman
Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Matt Cartwright, Ranking Member
Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Cartwright,

On behalf of The Census Project, a broad-based coalition of business, civic, human services, state and local government, and academic groups committed to supporting the U.S. Census Bureau’s mission to produce full, fair, complete, and accurate data, we are writing to express our concerns regarding the subcommittee’s proposed Fiscal Year 2025 Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) Appropriations bill.

Simply put, the proposed bill would undermine the ability of the Census Bureau to meet its constitutional mandate as the result of inadequate funding and a menacing policy provision (Sec. 621). Funding

The Subcommittee’s bill provides the U.S. Census Bureau with $1.354 billion—the same funding level that the Subcommittee recommended in Fiscal Year 2024. This amount is below the agency’s final FY 2024 funding level and the Administration’s budget request, as well as the amount that over 120 national, state, and local organizations urged Congress to provide the Bureau in Fiscal Year 2025.

Fiscal Year 2025 marks the midpoint in the decade-long planning process for the next decennial census in which preparations and costs begin to exponentially increase. In FY 2025, the Bureau will finalize plans and preparations for the 2026 Census Test, the first of two major field tests. The outcome of these tests will inform key facets of the 2030 Census.

We know from the last decade how inadequate funding mid-decade adversely affected the conduct of the 2020 Census. When Congress failed to meet the Administration’s request for 2020 Census planning in Fiscal Years 2012-2017, the Census Bureau had to cancel every planned test in a rural area and on American Indian reservations, including two of three dress rehearsal sites in 2018. After the census, the Bureau’s check of its work showed a net undercount of 5.64 percent on American Indian reservations, and a net undercount of 2.58 percent in areas counted with a modified census packet delivery method called “Update/Leave,” which is used primarily in rural areas.

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Further, as a result of funding cutbacks, the Bureau also was unable to test new methods to count group facilities (e.g. college dorms, prisons, and nursing homes) electronically in the 2020 Census, instead falling back on more costly, time-consuming, and less accurate paper-based procedures. The Bureau acknowledged an undercount of people living in Group Quarters and offered localities a chance to submit more data after the census was finished to update those numbers—a bureaucratic burden that could have potentially been avoided if the proposed new enumeration methods had been assessed.

As we learned in the run up to the 2020 Census, postponing planning for decennial operations introduces greater risk to a successful outcome. Adequate support for decennial census preparations now will reduce the risk of requiring unplanned, additional funding in the peak years at the end of the decade and help ensure that the 2030 Census is conducted in an inclusive, cost effective, and efficient manner.

**Policy Provisions**

The Subcommittee’s bill includes policy provisions that would not only unconstitutionally exclude individuals who are in the United States unlawfully from the apportionment base, but also adversely affect the quality and availability of census survey data—especially for small populations and areas. Focusing on the latter, our coalition is concerned about the potential implications of Section 621.

Section 621 states that “*None of the funds in this Act may be used to enforce involuntary compliance, or to inquire more than twice for voluntary compliance with any survey conducted by the Bureau of the Census.*” If adopted, this language would prohibit enforcement of the mandatory response requirement on the decennial headcount and the American Community Survey (ACS), while also restricting the Bureau’s ability to conduct non-response follow-up operations across all of its surveys.

This provision would have a devastating impact on the decennial census, which historically has had to send more than two invitations to self-respond in order to count more than half of U.S. households. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Census 2020 Non-Response Follow Up operations, the two-contact strategy would have meant that 17 million U.S. households, or 38.5% of the non-responding households, would have gone uncounted in the 2020 Census. The provision would likewise undermine coverage in the ACS and the Current Population Survey, which require more than 3 and approximately 2.5 follow-up contacts, respectively. Major business, economic, and demographic surveys that have multiple follow-up contact strategies would likewise be adversely impacted. Given the havoc this provision would have on all of the Bureau’s surveys, we urge removal of this provision as the bill proceeds through the legislative process.
Thank you for considering our views as you negotiate a final FY 2025 CJS appropriations bill. We look forward to working with you to produce a final FY 2025 CJS bill that provides the U.S. Census Bureau with robust funding and empowers the agency to fulfill its mission.

Sincerely,

Mary Jo H. Mitchell  
Census Project Co-Director

Howard Fienberg  
Census Project Co-Director