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October 8, 2024

Dr. Robert Santos
Director
U.S. Census Bureau
4600 Silver Hill Road
Washington, DC 20233

Dear Director Santos,

As you know, the Census Bureau is currently running on a continuing resolution (CR), funded at Fiscal Year 2024 levels until December 20, 2024. The Biden Administration did not request a funding “anomaly” for the Bureau, despite stakeholder concerns that we are nearing a precarious point in the decennial cycle where simple flat funding could jeopardize preparations for the 2030 Census, particularly the upcoming field tests.

As we pass the half-way point in the decennial cycle, and the troubling pattern of incomplete and untimely funding decisions continues, we urge you, on behalf of our nearly 900 stakeholder groups in the public and private sectors at the local, state and national levels, to carefully consider the need for a funding “anomaly” for the Census Bureau if another CR becomes necessary.

As the Census Bureau prepares for the 2026 field test across six sites, we hope that you will heed lessons learned from the last census cycle. In 2017, the Bureau had planned three site tests, in large part to evaluate updated counting methods in rural communities and on American Indian reservations. When Congress failed to pass the FY 2016 appropriations bills on time, and also didn’t include a funding anomaly for the Census Bureau in subsequent CRs, the Census Director at the time canceled the 2017 tests, because he didn’t know if Congress would give the Census Bureau enough money to move forward in all sites. Unfortunately, American Indians living on reservations suffered the highest net undercount of any race group in the 2020 Census, and rural households were missed at a higher rate than nonrural households.

As summarized by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in a February 2022 report, “The Bureau canceled or delayed many of its planned tests and justified the decisions citing budgetary issues, such as sequestration in 2013 and continuing resolutions in fiscal year 2017.”

CRs, at least, are an unfortunate regular occurrence in the annual budget process -- a process not designed to handle long-term pre-defined funding ramp-ups like those necessary for executing a decennial census. GAO's (understated) conclusion was that, "The Bureau can likely expect continuing resolutions to continue to influence the budgetary environment."¹

Therefore, we urge you to speak up on behalf of the Census Bureau as the decennial clock ticks down. If the current CR is in danger of extending beyond the first quarter of FY 2025 (or when we find ourselves in a similar situation heading into FY 2026, etc.), the Census Bureau must be vocal about the potentially damaging impacts of flat funding and request a funding anomaly if necessary.

Meanwhile, census stakeholder will continue to share information with the Administration and Congress on census appropriations (like the [Census Project's FY 2025 Budget Recommendation](#), and stakeholder sign-on letters sent on [April 10](#) and [July 29](#)).

On behalf of all of our stakeholders, we thank you for your continued dedication to an inclusive and accurate 2030 Census.

Sincerely,



Mary Jo H. Mitchell
Co-director
The Census Project



Howard Fienberg
Co-director
The Census Project

¹ "2020 CENSUS: Lessons Learned from Planning and Implementing the 2020 Census Offer Insights to Support 2030 Preparations." February 2022. GAO. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104357.pdf>