



November 4, 2015

## Oppose Any Rider to Make American Community Survey Voluntary; Support Greater Funding for Census Bureau

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Dear Representative:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, we urge you to **support a restoration of the funding for the Census Bureau** that was cut in the FY 2016 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill (H.R. 2578). We also urge you to **reject any rider that would convert the American Community Survey (ACS) from a mandatory to a voluntary survey.**

The Leadership Conference considers a fair and accurate census and comprehensive ACS among the most significant civil rights issues facing the country today. Census data ensure fair, proportionate voting representation for all Americans. Federal funding for key programs, such as education, health care, and rural broadband access, is determined by census data. Further, census data assist federal agencies, like the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, in monitoring discrimination.

H.R. 2578 cuts the Census Bureau's budget request by \$387 million, or 26 percent, a reduction that primarily will affect planning for the 2020 Census at a critical point in the decennial cycle. At stake are sweeping reforms the bureau is pursuing to modernize the census process and reduce the lifecycle cost of the census by \$5 billion, while maintaining accuracy and quality. Next year, the Census Bureau must begin to develop all IT systems and the operational infrastructure for the 2020 Census in time for an end-to-end readiness test in 2018. The bureau also must contract for a vast communications campaign that can navigate a fragmented media landscape, begin development of language and questionnaire assistance materials, research effective methods for enumerating special populations (such as homeless persons and overseas military personnel), and finalize the content of the questionnaire in order to meet legal deadlines.

The funding allocated in H.R. 2578 is dangerously low and could force the bureau to abandon some or all of its cost-saving initiatives — including an Internet and smartphone response option, use of administrative records to reduce the cost of non-response followup, targeted pre-census address canvassing, and automated, streamlined field operations — and revert to outdated, costly methods used in 2010 and previous censuses.

H.R. 2578 also cuts the ACS budget by \$42 million from the current year funding level. The ACS, an ongoing part of the decennial census, provides irreplaceable, high-quality annual data on key social and economic characteristics for every community in the country. This reduction could force the Census Bureau to reduce the ACS sample size or reduce the

survey's coverage, again jeopardizing the availability of essential data for small areas and populations, rural communities, and people in special living situations, such as nursing homes, college campuses, and military installations.

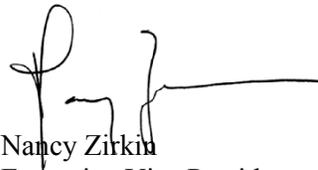
We also urge you to reject any rider that would make response to the ACS voluntary. Census Bureau research and tests have demonstrated that making response to the ACS voluntary will lead to dramatically lower response rates, significantly higher costs (as much as \$90 million per year more), and the loss of any reliable data for many hard-to-count populations and for smaller (less populous) geographic areas, including rural counties, small cities, towns, neighborhoods and American Indian reservations. We encourage you to consider that when Canada converted its mandatory census long form to a voluntary survey in 2011, response rates dropped by more than 25 percent, costs increased by \$22 million, and Statistics Canada was unable to produce vital data for a quarter of the nation's places — mostly small and rural areas.

Adequate funding for the 2020 Census and related ACS is a wise and necessary investment in the effective governance of our nation and preservation of our democratic ideals. We urge you to reject any rider to make the ACS voluntary, and we encourage your support for a more reasonable funding level for the Census Bureau as Congress continues consideration of the FY 2016 CJS bill. If you need further information or have any questions regarding this issue, please contact Corrine Yu, Leadership Conference Managing Policy Director at 202-466-5670.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson  
President & CEO



Nancy Zirkin  
Executive Vice President