



September 11, 2017

Protect a Successful 2020 Census; Oppose Comstock Amendment #85 to H.R. 3354

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 oppose Comstock Amendment #85 to H.R. 3354, the “Make America Secure and Prosperous Appropriations Act, 2018,” which would further erode critical funding for the 2020 Census. The amendment would shift \$30 million from the U.S. Census Bureau to the Commerce Department’s Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) program.

The Leadership Conference considers a fair and accurate census 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 in monitoring discrimination.

We know that the Manufacturing Extension Partnership program is an important resource in many communities. But the 2020 Census cannot afford to lose any more funding without putting a cost-effective and accurate census at risk in every district and community. Census costs will go up, and accuracy will go down. **We urge lawmakers to find an alternative offset to achieve the goal of the Comstock census amendment while protecting the constitutionally required decennial census and other important datasets from serious damage.**

The allocation for the Census Bureau already is too low. Unfortunately, several successive years of underfunding have forced the Census Bureau to eliminate, streamline, or delay vital planning activities, putting achievement of a cost-effective and accurate 2020 Census in jeopardy. The CJS Subcommittee’s FY 2018 mark for the Census Bureau is woefully inadequate and unrealistic, as the Census Bureau conducts final tests and starts field preparations next year. House appropriators have recognized the challenge and are awaiting an updated cost estimate from the administration. Therefore, it would be irresponsible to cut the budget further.

The consequences of underfunding this year and an insufficient budget request for 2018 are widespread and troubling. For example:

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- There is **no funding for the vital "partnership program"** in 2018 that will connect the Census Bureau with state and local governments for the 2020 Census.
- The critical 2018 "dress rehearsal" (End-to-End Census Test) has been cut from three sites to one, leaving **no opportunity to test census operations in rural communities before 2020**.
- Research and development of an **effective advertising campaign**, which will help contain costs by convincing people to participate in the census, is **months behind schedule**; the Census Bureau had to cancel the advertising campaign for next year's dry-run.

Further, the destruction that has or will be left in the wakes of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma will require intense, and far more costly, on-the-ground canvassing before and during the 2020 Census to ensure that all affected communities are counted successfully and accurately. Accurate census data are an essential part of emergency preparedness and disaster response and recovery plans for FEMA, states, and localities across the nation. More broadly, [almost \\$600 billion a year](#)¹ in vital federal assistance to states, localities, and families is allocated through the 16 largest census-guided programs alone.

No one benefits from a failed census. Cutting additional funds from the Census Bureau's budget now will result in billions of dollars in added 2020 Census costs in the next few years and threaten a successful enumeration in all states and communities. For these reasons, we urge you to oppose the Comstock census amendment and work to find an alternative offset to achieve the amendment's goals. If you have any questions, please contact Corrine Yu, Managing Policy Director, at (202) 466-5670.

Sincerely,



Vanita Gupta
President & CEO

¹ Reamer, Andrew. "Counting for Dollars: The Role of the Decennial Census in the Geographic Distribution of Federal Funds." GW Institute of Public Policy, June 4, 2017. See: <http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/census/CountingForDollars-Intro.pdf>