



**TESTIMONY OF
THE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS
FISCAL YEAR 2024 APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE CENSUS BUREAU**

**UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE, AND RELATED AGENCIES**

MAY 12, 2023

Chair Shaheen, Ranking Member Moran, and members of the committee:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 230 national organizations committed to promoting and protecting the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, we urge you to include no less than \$2 billion for the Census Bureau in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. Funding in the early years of the census cycle lays the foundation for the count at the end of the decade and in turn affects the data used for years to come. Now is the time to prioritize adequate funding for the Census Bureau and its programs.

The Leadership Conference considers a fair and accurate census one of the most significant civil rights issues facing the country today. Accurate census data are integral to moving our democracy forward. The data ensure fair and proportionate voting representation and guide federal funding for key programs, including education, health care, and rural broadband access. Furthermore, census data are necessary to implement, monitor, and enforce anti-discrimination and civil rights laws across a wide range of federal agencies. Through the decennial census, the American Community Survey (ACS), Population Estimates Program, and many other surveys and programs, the Census Bureau provides the most expansive data regarding our nation's demographic, socio-economic, and housing characteristics. Adequate funding for the Census Bureau is a necessary and prudent investment in the effective governance of our nation and the preservation of our democratic ideals.

Insufficient funding for the Census Bureau will have far-reaching impacts. Inadequate funding will affect the agency's ability to produce and publish accurate data that inform policymaking, influence economic productivity and expansion by guiding wise business investments, and help guide the fair distribution of resources to all communities. Adequate funding would help the Census Bureau improve the enumeration of historically undercounted and misrepresented communities, address complex issues in collecting data, and integrate data processing and data collection to enhance data quality in real time.

Even as the Census Bureau continues to release data from the 2020 Census, delayed in large part due to the coronavirus pandemic, the 2030 Census planning cycle is already well underway. Funding at this stage is vital to support critical research and testing geared towards achieving an inclusive, accurate, and

cost-effective 2030 Census. As the Census Bureau works to modernize and elevate the efficiency and accuracy of the decennial count, at this point in the census cycle, insufficient funding would undermine the progress that has been made by the bureau and hinder future progress. This is especially true as the bureau ramps up to begin developing IT systems and the operational infrastructure for the 2030 Census. We highlight, for particular consideration, funding for the following key Census Bureau activities.

American Community Survey (ACS)

As an ongoing part of the census, the ACS provides invaluable, high-quality data annually on social and economic characteristics for every community in the country. Inadequate funding for the ACS could jeopardize the accuracy of these data by forcing the Census Bureau to reduce the sample size for the survey. This would adversely affect the availability of data for small localities (such as towns), rural and remote areas, small population groups, American Indian reservations and Alaska Native villages, and Group Quarters facilities generally. All census-guided federal spending relies on the ACS to some degree; accurate ACS data depend on an accurate decennial census, which serves as a control and ensures a representative sample for the ACS. Yet, funding for the ACS has remained relatively stagnant for years. The ACS needs a boost in funding to implement long-needed updates to the survey, address steadily declining response rates, and make other methodological and operational improvements to ensure that the survey is accurately capturing the economic and demographic diversity of American households.

Preparing for the 2030 Census

As noted above, investment in early planning for the decennial census will not only improve accuracy but also modernize census operations in a way that will save money over the entirety of the census lifecycle. Timely, focused research and testing now will ensure that the Census Bureau can leverage emerging statistical methods, technology, and communication platforms, helping to contain overall census costs by boosting self-response rates and supplementing direct counting methods with high quality administrative records when appropriate.

Population Estimates Program

The population estimates produced by the Census Bureau set the denominators for the bureau's demographic surveys, especially the ACS, which directly influences the distribution of federal funds. Most federal assistance to states and localities — for schools, highway and road improvement, hospitals, health care, and other vital programs — is based on the annual population estimates; the previous decennial census provides the “base” for updated population numbers. And yet, the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program has less funding than it did 20 years ago in 2003. In the report accompanying the House FY23 Commerce, Justice, Science appropriations bill, the House Appropriations Committee directed the Census Bureau to strengthen the Population Estimates Program to mitigate the consequences of operational disruptions during the 2020 Census that resulted in differential undercounts of racial and ethnic populations, renters, rural households, and young children. A well-funded estimates program would allow for consistent improvements across all states and more outreach to states and localities that could share high quality data to bolster the accuracy of the numbers, but that lack



the resources to engage consistently and effectively with the Census Bureau. Congress must ensure that these estimates are as accurate as possible to ensure prudent policy decisions and fair allocation of taxpayer dollars.

We urge the subcommittee to provide the Census Bureau with no less than \$2 billion in FY2024 to enrich the quality and accuracy of all census data sets, enhance the American Community Survey, continue the preparations needed for the 2030 Census, and support the Population Estimates Program. Thank you for your consideration of our views as we work together to support a fair and accurate census.