

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 25, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Chair Cole, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

In our leadership roles on the authorizing committees with jurisdiction over the U.S. Census Bureau, we are writing to express our support for ensuring the Census Bureau receives the highest possible level of funding in the final Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) appropriations bill—specifically the amount advanced by the Senate Appropriations Committee, \$1.577 billion. While we understand the pressures of this fiscal year, we request that you keep in mind the timeliness of adequate Census Bureau funding to help control long-term costs and meet critical national data needs.

Given our oversight over the Census Bureau, we understand FY25 funding is particularly crucial for 2030 Census preparations and efficiency, as well as necessary economic data and crucial national surveys.¹ In particular, 2025 marks the midpoint in the decade-long preparations for the 2030 Census, and is a critical turning point for an efficient and accurate census. The decennial census is required under the U.S. Constitution and accurate results are necessary for every community in the nation. Investing in the 2030 Census now is essential for controlling costs and reducing risks later in the census cycle. The Census Bureau must finalize long-term planning and testing this fiscal year, which in turn will allow it to most efficiently execute the census and manage lifecycle costs over the next five years. In FY25, the Bureau must establish the census operational design, plan for key contracts, and finalize preparations for the 2026 Census Test—the first of two major field tests. These tests will inform key facets of the 2030 Census and mitigate problems.²

It is important to avoid funding shortfalls like those that occurred early in the 2020 Census cycle, which forced the Bureau to scale back testing and adversely affected the 2020 Census. Due to inadequate funding 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

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Congressional Budget Justification Fiscal Year 2025* (Mar. 2024) (<https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2024-03/CENSUS-FY2025-Congressional-Budget-Submission.pdf>).

² U.S. Census Bureau, *2026 Census Test* (Aug. 2024) (<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade/2030/planning-management/plan/research-and-testing/2026-census-test.html>).

dress rehearsal sites in 2018.³ After the census, the Bureau’s own accuracy estimates showed gaps including a net undercount of 5.64% on American Indian reservations, and a net undercount of 2.58% in rural areas (those counted using the “Update Leave” method).⁴ Due to the funding shortfall and cancelled 2020 tests, the Bureau was also unable to test new methods for electronically counting Group Quarters (e.g. nursing homes, college dorms, military quarters, and correctional facilities), which led to implementation problems and forced the Bureau to fall back on more costly and time-consuming procedures.⁵ These challenges, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, created significant issues with Group Quarters data and led the Bureau to create a special program to review Group Quarters that were not correctly counted.⁶

Adequate support for decennial census preparations now will reduce the risk of unplanned costs later in the census cycle and will help ensure the 2030 Census is conducted accurately and efficiently. In addition to the decennial census, FY25 funding is crucial for the Economic Census, supporting statistics that underlie the nation’s leading economic indicators. It will also keep Bureau programs on-schedule, fund essential surveys that countless communities and businesses rely on, support secure Census Bureau IT infrastructure, and ensure effective communication with states and jurisdictions.

This is a pivotal year to ensure robust support for the Census Bureau. The funding levels recommended by the House and Senate Appropriations Committees pose divergent outlooks for the Census Bureau. The funding level recommended by the House Appropriations Committee, \$1.354 billion, falls below the agency’s enacted FY24 level, jeopardizing critical data and future planning. We support the amount advanced by the Senate Appropriations Committee, and encourage you to keep in mind the essential nature of the Bureau’s programs.

Thank you for considering our views as you negotiate the final FY25 appropriations measures.

Sincerely,



Gary C. Peters
Chairman
Senate Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs



Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member
House Committee on Oversight
and Accountability

³ Government Accountability Office, *Lessons Learned from Planning and Implementing the 2020 Census Offer Insights to Support 2030 Preparations* (GAO-22-104357), at 7-8 (Feb. 2022) (<https://www.gao.gov/assets/720/719018.pdf>); *Actions Needed to Mitigate Key Risks Jeopardizing a Cost-Effective and Secure Enumeration* (GAO-18-543T) at 8 (May 2018) (<https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-18-543t.pdf>).

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, *2020 Post-Enumeration Surveys* (<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/about/coverage-measurement/pes.2020.html>).

⁵ Government Accountability Office, *Lessons Learned, supra* note 1, at 8; *Decennial Census: Bureau Should Assess Significant Data Collection Challenges as It Undertakes Planning for 2030* (GAO-21-365) (Mar. 2021) (<https://www.gao.gov/assets/d21365.pdf>).

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, *2020 Census Group Quarters* (Mar. 16, 2021) (<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2021/03/2020-census-group-quarters.html>); 2020 Post Census Group Quarter Review (Jul. 3, 2023) (<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade/2020/planning-management/evaluate/pcgqr.html>).

cc The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
The Honorable Jerry Moran
The Honorable Hal Rogers
The Honorable Matt Cartwright