



Association of Public Data Users

c/o APB Associates
28300 Franklin Rd
Southfield, MI 48034

January 16, 2007

Honorable David Obey
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
H-218 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Honorable Obey:

The Association of Public Data Users (APDU), whose member organizations come from public sector, business, and non-profit groups across the country, urges you to carefully consider the funding level for the U.S. Census Bureau as soon as possible. Without a funding increase over the Fiscal Year 2006 level, significant elements of the 2010 Census design are in jeopardy. This lack of funding puts at risk the accuracy of the decennial population count, the availability of comprehensive socio-economic data from the American Community Survey and the quality data from other Census Bureau surveys.

APDU is a national network of 80 organizations with a shared vital concern about the collection, dissemination, preservation, and interpretation of public data. A reduction in funding threatens the quality and availability of survey data used by many federal agencies, state and local governments, the private sector and research institutions. Information from these surveys, in turn, forms the basis for a myriad of policy choices. These data help you and other policymakers decide what services your constituents need and how best to allocate funding for government programs to address these needs. Businesses also rely on these data to make vital decisions on where to locate and invest, thus driving economic activity in every community.

Funding the Fiscal Year 2007 appropriation at the level requested by President Bush will help ensure that the Census Bureau can make the critical transition from planning the 2010 Census to the operational phase. While the population count is still several years away, this year's activities represent the real start of the process, as preparations for the 2008 Dress Rehearsal will determine the final census design. Without an increase in funding, the Census Bureau has said it will halt development of GPS-equipped handheld computers for address canvassing and follow-up interviews with unresponsive households. The planned automation of field work, the most costly phases of the census, represents the single greatest advancement in census operations for 2010. Without this innovation, the cost of the 2010 Census could increase by \$1 billion. In addition, the alternative enumeration methods rely on less efficient methods, thereby increasing the probability that the count will be less accurate.

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Other possible consequences of insufficient funding for the Census Bureau include:

- Reducing the accuracy of local address lists. In 2007, the Census Bureau should start working with local governments throughout the nation to verify the nationwide address list, the foundation of an accurate count of the nation's residents. Without adequate funding, this program may need to be completed on a shortened time schedule, leading to a reduction in vital local government participation. As evidenced by address list deficiencies for prisons, college dormitories, and similar facilities in Census 2000, errors on the address list lead to incorrect population counts for many jurisdictions and jeopardize the usability of census data when local governments make decisions.
- Suspending digital mapping updates. These maps provide critical information about the location of respondents to the census and, along with the address list, form the basis for all census data collections operations.
- Eliminating coverage of "group quarters" in the American Community Survey. Without group quarters data, policymakers will not have detailed demographic information on people living in nursing homes, prisons, college dormitories, military barracks, and other group facilities. With this part of the population missing from the data, local governments will lack a clear understanding of the trends, resources, and needs of their communities.
- Curtailing preparations for the 2007 Economic Census. The Economic Census is the sole source of comprehensive information about business operations, including key industry data, in local economies. A thorough, complete Economic Census is also crucial to the preparation of accurate estimates of the nation's Gross Domestic Product.

Delaying preparation for the 2010 Census and 2007 Economic Census will likely result in more costly, labor intensive, and time-consuming data collection methods, as well as less accurate and less useful information. I respectfully urge you to consider the importance of continuing comprehensive preparations for these legally mandated censuses when you assess the need for an exception to the Continuing Resolution for the Fiscal Year 2007 Census Bureau budget.

Sincerely,

Leonard Martin Gaines, Ph.D.
President
Association of Public Data Users