

RECOMMENDED FY 2020 APPROPRIATION FOR THE 2020 CENSUS: *The Stakeholder Case for Sufficient, On-Time Funding*

SUMMARY:

A year from now, the 2020 Census will be in full swing, with most American households receiving their census materials in mid-March 2020. **Insufficient, delayed, or uncertain full-year funding for the 2020 Census at the start of FY 2020 could disrupt the final glide path to the start of peak operations in January 2020— and put a cost-effective, successful census in jeopardy.**

Stakeholders urge Congress to appropriate **\$8.45 billion for the U.S. Census Bureau, including at least \$7.581 billion in direct funding for 2020 Census operations.** This funding will support a census that counts all communities equally well, as well as reliable, comprehensive demographic and economic data to guide prudent, effective policymaking and resource allocation. President Trump requested a \$6.15 billion appropriation for the Census Bureau, including \$5.3 billion in direct funding for the 2020 Census. Our “ask” for relevant activities breaks down as follows:

➔ Periodic Censuses and Programs (PCP) account (subtotal):	\$8.174 billion
➔ 2020 Census:	\$7.581 billion
➔ American Community Survey (ACS):	\$226.3 million
➔ Other PCP programs:	\$366.6 million
➔ Current Surveys and Programs (CSP) account (subtotal):	\$274.2 million
➔ TOTAL U.S. Census Bureau:	\$8.448 billion

EXPLANATION:

The stakeholder funding recommendation starts with the Department of Commerce FY 2020 cost estimate (released in October 2017) of \$6.694 billion. We recommend the following enhancements, based directly on spending priorities set forth in House and Senate Appropriations Committee reports:

- **Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QAC) in hard-to-count communities (+\$66 million)** — With a greatly reduced field infrastructure for the 2020 Census (half the number of regional and local census offices compared to 2010), and an emphasis on internet response, QACs will be a cost-effective way to help harder-to-count households answer the census safely and completely. The Census Bureau can partner with libraries, community and senior centers, high-traffic businesses, service agencies, and houses of worship to provide secure help in filling out census forms on-line or by phone. Staffing QACs at convenient hours with sworn census staff, hired locally, will increase access to “trusted messengers” and confidence in the process.

- **Expanded targeted communications (+\$100 million)** — *Targeted* advertising and outreach will help boost response in the wake of growing risks facing the 2020 Census, including cyber-threats, disinformation campaigns, distrust of government, the digital divide, and the opioid crisis. Additional research and targeted messaging can address (1) the disproportionate undercount of *young children*; (2) disengagement of *young mobile adults*; (3) specific language assistance needs in some neighborhoods; and (4) fear that government agencies will use personal census responses to harm people.

- **Increased Partnership Program staff (+\$31.5 million)** — Partnership Program staff educate and mobilize states, localities, and community-based organizations in support of the census. Engaging these “trusted messengers” is especially critical in reaching harder-to-enumerate population groups, including persons with disabilities, low-income rural and urban households, families with young children, Native Americans,

limited English proficiency households, people of color, and LGBTQ individuals. Stakeholders recommend increasing Partnership Program staff from 1,500 to at least 2,000, moving the 2020 Census effort closer to peak 2010 partnership staffing, as Congress directed.

- **Contingency fund (+\$689.2 million)** — Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross recommended a 10 percent contingency fund in the department’s revised census lifecycle cost estimate. This traditional fund is especially vital for 2020 to avoid disruption in census operations, in light of (1) communities recovering from recent tornadoes, hurricanes, flooding, and wildfires; (2) the real possibility that extreme weather events could ravage more areas later this year and during the census; (3) the growing threat of cyber-attacks from foreign actors, highlighted recently by DHS Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen; and (4) a projected drop in self-response due to possible addition of a new citizenship question.

AND, IMPORTANT TO KNOW ...

Two historical trends support the reasonable stakeholder funding proposal. (1) About half of the census lifecycle cost is spent in the census year (i.e. fiscal year ending in “0”). The Commerce Department’s 2020 Census lifecycle cost estimate is \$15.6 billion. (2) Census year funding for the decennial census is at least twice the funding level of the prior fiscal year. The FY 2019 appropriation for the 2020 Census was \$3.015 billion, which **supplemented** \$1.056 billion in carried-over funding from the FY 2018 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill, for a total of \$4+ billion in available resources.

Finally, at the start of the census planning cycle, Congress urged the Census Bureau to keep 2020 Census costs on par with the 2010 Census. That was a tall order, and risks associated with the first high-tech census, growing mistrust of government, and other challenges have increased the “lifecycle” cost of this census, as Secretary Ross told Congress in October 2017. However, our proposed funding increase of less than \$4 billion over available FY 2019 resources compares favorably with the increase of \$4.2 billion between FY 2009 and FY 2010. Overall, the 2010 Census budget was \$7.6 billion in FY 2010, not much less than our estimate for FY 2020, even without adjusting for inflation. These comparisons suggest that Congress can fund a census that will be successful *and* cost-effective, despite a larger, more diverse population and many other unprecedented challenges.

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