

To Ensure a Successful 2020 Census, Funding Must Be Adequate and On-time *2020 Census Needs \$7.5 Billion Starting October 1st*

The U.S. Census Bureau will send or hand-deliver 2020 Census materials to most U.S. households in mid-March 2020, with important final preparation steps – from recruiting staff and verifying addresses to finalizing outreach and advertising plans – already proceeding in high gear. An accurate count requires sufficient resources; we believe **\$7.5 billion in new funding** will meet that goal. *But the timing of that funding also is critically important.* The Census Bureau must have the certainty of full funding for the decennial census at the *start* of the fiscal year, so that it knows the level of resources it will have to conduct the count and can move ahead with final preparations without concern that its funding may fall short of need.

The House included \$7.5 billion for the decennial census in its FY 2020 Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriations bill (H.R. 3055), as part of a total of **\$8.175 billion for the Bureau’s Periodic Censuses and Programs account**. But final action on appropriations bills was delayed while Congress worked to reach an overall budget agreement on topline funding for discretionary programs. The budget agreement, now enacted, recognized the importance of adequate funding for the 2020 census, allowing \$2.5 billion in Census Bureau funding to be excluded from the overall limits (or “caps”) on nondefense discretionary program funding.

Most FY 2020 appropriations bills will not be finalized until later in the fall (at best), well after the October 1 start to the fiscal year. For many parts of the federal government, operating at the previous year’s funding level until new spending bills are enacted, while not ideal, does not unduly hinder program operations. *That is not the case for the 2020 Census.* Because of the time-sensitive nature of final census preparations, the constitutional and statutory requirements to conduct the census on schedule, and the Census Bureau’s need to ensure that it does not run out of money before the enumeration is complete, it is critical that the Bureau receive its full 2020 funding by October 1, rather than receiving temporary funding followed by its full year allocation, potentially as late as Christmas (or even later, depending on whether there are sticking points related to other programs that hold up final action on appropriations).

The following are examples of activities requiring significant expenditures that the Census Bureau must carry out, or make final preparations to carry out, in the first three months of the fiscal year, which can happen only if the Bureau knows its funding level for the full fiscal year:

- Final address list verification and updating;
- Strengthening cyber-security and ensuring adequate load capacity for IT systems;
- Recruitment, hiring, and training for peak census operations field staff;
- Completing ad buys and launching comprehensive national and targeted advertising;
- Advance contact for enumeration of group living facilities (such as college dorms, nursing homes, military barracks, and prisons);
- Real-time modification of plans to count communities hit by and recovering from natural disasters; and
- Final preparations and launch of peak counting operations in Remote Alaska, which must start in January.

To be sure, a large share of FY 2020 funding will be spent after January 1 (Q2 and beyond). However, the Census Bureau needs to know at the start of the fiscal year how much money it will

have for the entire year, so it knows what efforts it can afford to undertake. Without funding certainty at the start of the year, the Census Bureau could decide it must curtail certain important activities – from outreach and advertising to cyber-security steps to hiring a full complement of census field staff – to prevent a funding shortfall later in the fiscal year. All major components of the census are equally important to assuring an accurate count, and the Bureau can't adequately fund and carry out each component in a timely way unless it knows how much money it will have for the full year at the start of the year.

Full funding, available at the start of the year, is critical to the Census Bureau's capacity to address threats to an accurate count – such as natural disasters, cyber-attacks, IT failures, and low initial self-response (a significant risk given the first-time nature of the online portal and the controversy related to the citizenship question). Adequate, timely funding allows the Census Bureau to reduce the risk of some of these threats, have plans ready to execute if these threats materialize, and execute those plans quickly if necessary. Insufficient resources – or uncertainty about its full-year funding level – will hinder the Bureau's ability to manage risk and plan for threats that may materialize.

Finally, we note that our overall recommended funding level of \$8.45 billion for the Census Bureau is *less than the inflation-adjusted appropriation for the Bureau in the last census cycle (2010) in the census year* (\$8.6 billion in 2020 dollars).

In the previous decennial cycle, when not all full-year appropriations bills were completed on time for FY 2010, Congress provided the Census Bureau with a full-year anomaly for its Periodic Censuses and Programs account in the first Continuing Resolution. If the FY 2020 Commerce, Justice, Science appropriations bill is not completed by October 1, Congress should once again provide the Census Bureau with its full-year budget at the start of the fiscal year.