



# THE CENSUS PROJECT

Supporting quality measures of America's economy and places

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July x, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson and Leader Jeffries,

On behalf of The Census Project, a broad-based coalition of business, civic, human services, state and local government, and academic groups committed to supporting the U.S. Census Bureau's mission to produce full, fair, complete, and accurate data, the undersigned groups write to express our concerns regarding the Fiscal Year 2025 Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) Appropriations bill that passed the House Appropriations Committee on July 9, 2024. The proposed bill would undermine the ability of the Census Bureau to meet its constitutional mandate as the result of inadequate funding, and a menacing policy provision (Sec. 621) that would ruin response rates to all Census Bureau surveys and result in the decennial census and the American Community Survey (ACS) counting barely a third of the country.

### Funding

The committee's bill provides the U.S. Census Bureau with \$1.354 billion—the same funding level that the committee recommended in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024. This amount is below the agency's final FY 2024 funding level and the Administration's budget request, as well as the amount [that over 120 national, state, and local organizations urged Congress to provide the Bureau in Fiscal Year 2025.](#)

Fiscal Year 2025 marks the midpoint in the decade-long planning process for the next decennial census in which preparations and costs begin to exponentially increase. In FY 2025, the Bureau will finalize plans and preparations for the 2026 Census Test, the first of two major field tests. The outcome of these tests will inform key facets of the 2030 Census.

Inadequate funding in the mid-2010s adversely affected the conduct of the 2020 Census. When Congress failed to meet the Administration's request 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 dress rehearsal sites in 2018. After the census, the Bureau's check of its

work showed a net undercount of 5.64 percent on American Indian reservations, and a net undercount of 2.58 percent in areas counted with a modified census packet delivery method called “Update/Leave,” which is used primarily in rural areas.

Further, as a result of funding cutbacks, the Bureau also was unable to test new methods to count group facilities (e.g. college dorms, prisons, and nursing homes) electronically in the 2020 Census, instead falling back on more costly, time-consuming, and less accurate paper-based procedures. The Bureau acknowledged an undercount of people living in Group Quarters and offered localities a chance to submit more data after the census was finished to update those numbers—a bureaucratic burden that could have potentially been avoided if the proposed new enumeration methods had been assessed.

As the U.S. learned in the run up to the 2020 Census, postponing planning for decennial operations introduces greater risk to a successful outcome. Adequate support for decennial census preparations now will reduce the risk of requiring unplanned, additional funding in the peak years at the end of the decade and help ensure that the 2030 Census is conducted in an inclusive, cost-effective, and efficient manner.

#### **Policy Provision: Sec. 621**

The committee’s bill would drastically undermine the quality and availability of census survey data, especially for small populations and areas, with Section 621, which states that *“None of the funds in this Act may be used to enforce involuntary compliance, or to inquire more than twice for voluntary compliance with any survey conducted by the Bureau of the Census.”*

If adopted, this language would prohibit enforcement of the mandatory response requirement on the decennial headcount and the American Community Survey (ACS), while also restricting the Bureau’s ability to conduct non-response follow-up operations across all of its surveys.

This provision would have an especially devastating impact on the decennial census, which must send way more than just two invitations to secure self-response. According to data from the Census Quality Reinforcement Task Force, **the 2020 Census had counted only 28% of U.S. households after the first two contacts, as of March 25, 2020, and no state had achieved even 35% coverage. Section 621, by cutting off contacts after that point, including non-response follow up operations, would leave as much as two-thirds of the U.S. uncouned in the 2030 Census.**

The provision would likewise undermine coverage in the ACS and the Current Population Survey, which usually require 2.5 to 3 follow up contacts. Major business, economic, and demographic surveys that have multiple follow up contact strategies would likewise be adversely impacted. These limitations on contacts with households, businesses, retail purchasers, wholesalers, manufacturers and others will have serious consequences on the reliability and accuracy of the many [economic indicators](#) produced by the Census Bureau, which move markets in the U.S. and around the world.

Given the havoc this provision would have on all of the Bureau's surveys, and the resulting inability to produce statistically-valid results, we urge removal of this provision as the bill proceeds through the legislative process.

Thank you for considering our views as you proceed toward a final FY 2025 CJS appropriations bill. We look forward to working with you to produce a final FY 2025 CJS bill that provides the U.S. Census Bureau with robust funding and empowers the agency to fulfill its mission.

Sincerely,