Dear Senator Reid and Senator McConnell:

We write to urge your strong support for the President’s Fiscal Year 2014 budget request of $982.5 million for the U.S. Census Bureau’s vital work, especially two core programs that are central to the nation’s democratic system of governance and sound decision-making capabilities: the American Community Survey (ACS) and 2020 decennial census.

The Census Project (www.thecensusproject.org) is a long-standing coalition of census stakeholders that includes state and local governments, business and industry, civil rights and labor groups, housing and child advocates, and research organizations that support an accurate and comprehensive census (of which the ACS is a part). We cannot overstate the importance of both the decennial enumeration and ACS to the work we all do. The data are central to our democracy, affecting not only political representation from Congress down to local school boards, but also the prudent allocation of federal aid to states and localities each year. Businesses use Census Bureau data daily to make investment decisions on location, hiring, and useful products and services that are key to our economic recovery and growth.

Even at this early point in the decade, planning for the 2020 Census is well underway and will reach a critical milestone in FY2014. The Census Bureau is considering up to six design alternatives for 2020, several of which incorporate bold, new methods to address the dual and difficult challenges of containing costs and maintaining accuracy. The agency must complete the research and testing phase of the decennial census lifecycle, and select its initial design option, in FY2014, in order to stay on a rigorous but necessary timetable for operational development and systems testing in subsequent years. Equally important, a robust ACS is an essential test-bed for many promising census methods, essentially serving as a cost-effective alternative to numerous field tests that were a hallmark of previous census planning efforts. The President’s full request of $726.4 million for the Periodic Programs and Censuses account is needed to ensure steady progress for 2020 Census planning and reliable, small-area data from the ACS.

Additional important goals for the 2020 Census in FY2014 include finalizing a strategy and framework for major acquisitions and baseline requirements for the IT infrastructure. Failure to complete all of these tasks thoroughly and on time could cost taxpayers billions of dollars more down the road — an outcome Congress has already said it will not tolerate.

The decennial census lifecycle is at a point where modest but steady funding increases are necessary to ensure significant operational and methodological reforms that the Government
Accountability Office, Commerce Department Inspector General, and Congress itself all say are essential to bring down the total cost of the 2020 enumeration. Sequestration and inadequate funding in Fiscal Year 2013 already threaten the Census Bureau’s ability to complete planned research and testing on schedule, to release critical economic and demographic data (most notably from the 2012 Economic Census) on time, and to conduct the five-year Survey of Business Owners, the only source of data on women-, minority-, and veteran-owned businesses.

Although all functions of the federal government are essential, the decennial census and American Community Survey provide a unique foundation for much of your work as decision-makers and prudent stewards of tax dollars. The President’s budget request for the Census Bureau is a truly modest investment in wise policymaking at every level of government and in the business and nonprofit sectors — one that affects the quality of life of every American and the condition of the communities in which they live and work.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. Please feel free to address any additional questions you may have to Census Project Co-Directors Phil Sparks (psparks@ccmc.org), Mary Jo Hoeksema (paaapc@crosslink.net), or Terri Ann Lowenthal (TerriAnn2K@aol.com).

Sincerely,

Alameda County Community Food Bank
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
American Planning Association
American Sociological Association
American Statistical Association
Asian American Federation
Asian American Justice Center, Member of Asian American Center for Advancing Justice
Asian Law Alliance
Asian Pacific American Legal Center
Association of Population Centers
Bill O’Dell, Shimberg Center for Housing Studies, University of Florida
California Housing Partnership
Center for Governmental Research
Center for Public Policy Priorities (TX)
Children’s Alliance (Washington State)
Community Action Partnership
Connecticut Association for Human Services
Connecticut Voices for Children
Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA)
Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
Decision Demographics
Demos
Direct Marketing Association
Guam Communications Network
HousingLink
Islamic Civic Engagement Project (Washington State)
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
Julian Samora Research Institute
Kapitbahay
Laurin Associates
League of American Bicyclists
Maine Children’s Alliance
Marketing Research Association (MRA)
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Mercy Housing
Michigan League for Public Policy
Midwest Political Science Association
Minnesota Housing Partnership
Minnesota State Demographic Center
Minnesotans for the American Community Survey
NAACP
National Association for Business Economics
National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund
National Housing Conference
National Priorities Project
Nazareth Housing Services
New Level Community Development Corporation
Nielsen
Northeast Florida Community Action Agency, Inc.
NYU Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy
PathWays PA
Population Association of America
Population Resource Center
Prison Policy Initiative
Rebuilding Together
Research Advisory Services, Inc.
RESULTS
Ribbon Demographics, LLC
Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness (SKCCH)
Shimberg Center for Housing Studies
South by North Strategies, Ltd.
South Florida Regional Planning Council
Southeast Michigan Census Council
Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians