April 22, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

The undersigned members of The Census Project coalition, a network of over 600 national, state and local organizations supporting the Census Bureau and the essential data it produces, are writing to urge your prompt nomination of the next Director of the U.S. Census Bureau.

As you know, Dr. Robert Groves resigned as Census Director last August; since his departure, Acting Director (and former Deputy Director) Thomas Mesenbourg has led the agency ably and proven himself to be an effective, experienced manager. Nonetheless, the Census Bureau needs a permanent director, particularly as the agency confronts serious budget challenges, defends the American Community Survey (ACS), and conducts critical testing and systems development for Census 2020. A provision in Public Law 112-166 (the Presidential Appointment and Streamlining Appointment Act) also provides an opportune time for the Administration to nominate a director who can, for the first time ever, serve up to two fixed five-year terms, providing the stability the bureau needs to put in place significant reforms for the next census.

The Census Project applauded your Administration for its support of this important legislation. For decades, census stakeholders lamented the disruption to census planning, preparation and execution caused not only by frequent turnover at the head of the Census Bureau, often tied to changes in administration, but by long White House delays in nominating census directors and further delays in Senate confirmations. A fixed term that outlasts a presidential term would span half of the decennial census "life cycle" — either preparation or operational — and allow for continuity of vision, goals and managerial decisions. The new law also provides guidelines for the qualifications of a census director: experience managing a large organization, and expertise in gathering and working with statistics.

On April 11, in testimony to the House Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Subcommittee, the Department of Commerce Inspector General Todd Zinser reinforced the need for a permanent Census Bureau Director.

"Leadership continuity is essential to maintain momentum as planning progresses for the 2020 decennial census. . . . Absent stable, committed leadership, any organization tends to revert to its embedded culture. Reverting to historical practices and limited design changes experienced in recent decennials will result in unsupportable cost growth for the next decennial. To coordinate ongoing activities leading to a cost-effective FY 2014 design decision, the appointment of a new director must be a priority."

We hope you will embrace this pivotal moment by prioritizing the appointment of a qualified candidate to lead the Census Bureau. Our network of diverse census stakeholders, which includes
business, labor, education, civil rights, human services, and scientific organizations, are prepared
to assist the Administration in moving this critical decision forward.

Sincerely,

American Sociological Association
American Statistical Association
Asian American Justice Center, Member of the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice
Association for University Business and Economic Research
Association of Population Centers
Center for People in Need
Coalition on Human Needs
Community Action Partnership
Community Action, Inc.
Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA)
Decision Demographics
Housing Leadership Council of San Mateo County
Julian Samora Research Institute
Kentucky Youth Advocates
Marketing Research Association
Michigan League for Public Policy
Midwest Political Science Association
NAACP
National Priorities Project
Population Association of America
Prison Policy Initiative
Southeast Michigan Census Council
Southern Echo, Inc.
Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium
Sunflower County Parents and Students Organization (Indianola, Miss.)