Statement from the Population Association of America/Association of Population Centers
Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013

The Presidents of the Population Association of America (PAA) and Association of Population Centers (APC), Dr. Christine Bachrach and Dr. Pamela Smock, urge Congress to pass the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013.

The proposal would achieve two important objectives:

- Restore order to the annual appropriations and budget process through 2015.
- Provide $63 billion in sequester relief over two years.

On November 22, in a letter (http://www.populationassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/Budget-Conferees-Balanced-Budget-Plan-11.22.13-.pdf) to the chairs of the budget conference committee chairs, PAA President Christine Bachrach and APC President Pamela Smock described the toll that recent budget cuts, including sequestration, and the cycle of continuing resolutions, government shutdowns, and threats of shutdowns are taking on the field of population science and the federal agencies that support it—particularly, the National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, Census Bureau, and other statistical agencies. They also stated concern about the long-term effects of the ongoing budget crisis on the population sciences, including the potential irretrievable loss of longitudinal data and the declining morale of the next generation of population scientists.

Despite hope this package will pass with broad, bipartisan support, the PAA and APC presidents are concerned about a provision in the bill that could preclude scientists from timely access to Death Master File (DMF) data. Population scientists, such as demographers, sociologists, economists, and statisticians, use these data in their research to, for example, verify the status of survey respondents and study the causes and effects of mortality. Population scientists have also developed important strategies, such as secure enclaves, to ensure these data are protected and used for very narrow scientific purposes. Currently, population scientists may pay to access non-state versions of the DMF data that the Department of Commerce releases within months. If this provision of the law is enacted, it is not clear scientists, including those who receive grant funding from the NIH and other federal agencies, will be allowed to access the data until three years after an individual’s death. Such a delay would have a very detrimental effect on the quality, accuracy, and timeliness of scientific research. We welcome the opportunity to work with Congress and the Administration to ensure this language does not have this effect moving forward.

The PAA and APC are two affiliated organizations that together represent over 4,000 social and behavioral scientists and over 40 population research centers nationwide that conduct research on the implications of population change. Our members, which include demographers, economists, sociologists, and statisticians, rely directly and indirectly on a number of federal programs, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation (NSF), Census Bureau, and other statistical agencies, to conduct scientific research, analyze changing demographic and socio-economic trends, develop policy recommendations, and train undergraduate and graduate students.