May 6, 2013

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President, United States of America  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

On behalf of the over 3,000 members of the Population Association of America (PAA) and over 40 population research centers nationwide belonging to the Association of Population Centers (APC), we want to acknowledge your remarks on April 29, commemorating the 150th anniversary of the National Academy of Sciences.

As leaders of two active organizations in the behavioral and social science research community, we are dismayed by the current negative discourse in which the nature and integrity of our research, and the peer review process used to assess it, are under attack. Your eloquent defense of the federal government’s support for all sciences, including the behavioral and social sciences, comes at a crucial time. As you know, the fiscal year 2013 Continuing Resolution that recently became law placed political constraints on the ability of the National Science Foundation (NSF) to fund political science research. The House Science Committee is now preparing to consider a bill that could unduly affect NSF’s grant-making decisions in all areas of science. Some organizations and members of Congress continue to criticize the legitimacy of particular federally supported, peer-reviewed grants, while others are suggesting that whole disciplines, such as economics research, should not receive funding from certain federal agencies.

As you know, the behavioral and social sciences have contributed in numerous ways towards improving the health and well being of the American people. For example, research funded through NSF and the National Institutes of Health has yielded significant findings, including:

- **Limiting the Spread of Infectious Diseases**
  - By investigating methods of preventing the spread of flu-like symptoms in school settings, researchers found that social distancing strategies in which schools were intermittently closed interrupted the contact network and were nearly as effective as a complete three-week school shutdown. School administrators and public health officials are using these findings to develop effective prevention strategies.

- **Reducing End-of-Life Health Care Costs**
  - Drawing on a longitudinal survey of 27,000 people 50 and older that investigates how the domains of family, economic resources, and health interact, researchers demonstrated that voluntary use of Advance Directives specifying preferences for end-of-life care, known...
from previous work to improve family satisfaction, significantly lower levels of Medicare spending in regions with higher end-of-life spending.

- **Assessing the Impact of Military Service on Our Returning Veterans**
  - A series of research projects that studied the employment, health, and family of veterans of World War II, the Vietnam War and the more recent all-volunteer military era identified important patterns in their post-military experience. This information is being used to inform how services, including health, education, and training, are designed and delivered to veterans.

- **Demonstrating the power of investments in early child development**
  - A Nobel-winning economist funded by the NIH demonstrated that early investments in the cognitive and socio-emotional development of disadvantaged children have much higher economic returns than later interventions such as reduced pupil-teacher ratios, public job training, convict rehabilitation programs, adult literacy programs, tuition subsidies, or expenditure on police.

While we are facing a number of challenges, we are pleased that you reminded us of the support we have from your Administration. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to supporting and protecting our nation's scientific research enterprise.

Sincerely,

Christine A. Bachrach
2013 President
Population Association of America

Pamela J. Smock, Ph.D.
2012-2013 President
Association of Population Centers

cc:   Dr. John Holdren, OSTP
      Dr. Philip Rubin, OSTP
      Dr. Carlos Pena, OSTP
      Ms. Bess Evans, OSTP
      Ms. Katherine Wallman, OMB