May 8, 2012

Honorable John Boehner  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
Office of the Speaker  
H-232 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Office of the Democratic Leader  
H-204 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Boehner and Minority Leader Pelosi:

We are writing to express our considerable concern with the proposed Fiscal Year 2013 (FY13) funding level for the U.S. Census Bureau, which the House of Representatives will consider this week as part of the Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill (H.R. 5326). The Appropriations Committee’s $86 million, or 12 percent, cut to the Periodic Censuses and Programs account could severely hamper thorough research and testing for the 2020 Census and curtail portions of the 2012 Economic Census, which provides vital benchmarks for key economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product.

The Census Project is a non-partisan, ad-hoc, broad-based coalition of over 50 national organizations, representing a diverse range of census stakeholders. The Project’s participants include data users in the business, housing, civil rights, academic and research, civic participation, child advocate, state and local government, and marketing sectors. Our common purpose is simple: To educate policymakers and the public about the importance of high quality, cost-effective and appropriately comprehensive census data for sound decision-making at all levels of government and in the private and non-profit sectors.

The Periodic Censuses and Programs account includes funding for several activities that are vital to testing and planning for the 2020 decennial census. The testing program includes an Internet response option and other bold operational changes that the Census Bureau must fully vet and analyze.
before it can prudently include them in the 2020 Census design. In our view, the proposed $52 million cut in Census 2020 planning, ostensibly to reduce overall costs for the next decennial census, is pennywise and pound-foolish for the American taxpayer. We urge the House of Representatives to support any efforts that could increase funding for the Periodic Census account and to oppose any amendments or other efforts that could lead to further proposed reductions in this account.

Further, the House committee’s directive to conduct the 2020 Census for no more than the cost of the 2010 Census does not acknowledge population and housing unit growth, as well as continued diversification, over the decade and could significantly affect the Census Bureau’s ability to enumerate historically hard-to-count groups — including people of color, immigrants, the poor, young children, and rural residents — accurately. We urge Congress to adopt more realistic report language in the final version of the agency’s FY 2013 spending measure, giving it the necessary flexibility to prepare for Census 2020.

Finally, we agree that the Census Bureau must take bold steps to contain census costs, but setting a cap on the cost of the 2020 Census is unprecedented in recent history and could force the agency to cut corners in research and testing and, more alarming, stop efforts to count some communities thoroughly during the census itself.

Congress depends on accurate census data to support a wide range of policy and funding allocation choices, as well as fair representation for its own Members. The nation depends on comprehensive economic and demographic data to measure its fiscal condition and guide policies that promote economic growth. We hope you will carefully consider our views and concerns as H.R. 5326 moves forward and take steps to ensure adequate funding for the Census Bureau in the next fiscal year.

Thank you for your consideration.

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
Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA)
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
Decision Demographics
Demos
Marketing Research Association
National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Education Fund
Population Association of America
Prison Policy Initiative
Project Vote
Southeast Michigan Census Council