

# Population Association of America Association of Population Centers

## Office of Government and Public Affairs

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September 6, 2016

The Honorable John Culberson, Chairman  
House Appropriations Committee  
Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Michael Honda, Ranking Member  
House Appropriations Committee  
Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Culberson and Ranking Member Honda,

On behalf of the Population Association of America (PAA) ([www.populationassociation.org](http://www.populationassociation.org)) and Association of Population Centers (APC), we congratulate you on producing a Fiscal Year 2017 Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations bill. As you and your staff deliberate final funding and policy decisions in both the anticipated continuing resolution (CR) and final FY 2017 omnibus spending measure, we want to share our views regarding your funding recommendations versus the Senate version of the bill and comment on the long-term funding outcome.

### **National Science Foundation-Support House increase for RRA**

The National Science Foundation (NSF) Social, Behavioral and Economic directorate (SBE) is a major source of funding for population science research and other social science research projects. For FY 2017, both the House and the Senate approved essentially flat funding for the Research and Related Activities (RRA) account within NSF, which funds research grants under the various directorates, including SBE. The Senate mark recommends a slight decrease of .08 percent in this account, while the House recommends an increase of about .08 percent. We understand that current spending caps allow little room for increases in funding from FY2016 to 2017 among the agencies covered in the CJS bill. However, we support the highest possible level of funding for NSF's RRA account—at a minimum to maintain level funding and avoid a funding cut.

In addition, we appreciate that both the House and Senate reports contain helpful language affirming the importance of NSF's



rigorous peer review process in selecting grant awards. We hope that any final agreement will retain similar language.

**Census Bureau—Support, at minimum, Senate level, \$1.5 billion**

As you know, FY 2017 is a pivotal year for Census 2020, as the Census Bureau must move from the systems and operations development phase and begin field infrastructure and communications preparations. For example, in FY2017, the agency must test new counting methods (including use of administrative records) in rural areas and on Tribal lands; finalize questionnaire topics; finalize decisions regarding sweeping design reforms and finish production of IT and operational systems, in time for an end-to-end readiness test in 2018; acquire space for six Regional Census Centers; and begin collecting address list updates from state and local governments.

While the Senate bill provided only 60 percent of the Administration’s requested increase for the agency, its funding level is higher than the amount recommended by the House (\$1.4 billion). At a minimum, we urge you to support the Senate level in the final FY 2017 funding measure. Without adequate funding next year, the Census Bureau could abandon new, cost-saving methods as too risky or insufficiently vetted — decisions that could increase census costs by billions of dollars and put the accuracy of Census 2020 at risk.

**Continuing Resolution (CR)**

Although passage of a CR appears necessary, we hope the CR will be short-term and only cover the time Congress needs during a lame duck, post-election session to pass a full-year omnibus spending measure.

As you know, long-term CRs are generally detrimental to effective fiscal management at the federal agency level. Because of budgetary uncertainties, federal agencies are required to plan for and assume worst-case funding levels, which as a practical matter can result in delay or suspension of important programmatic initiatives, opportunity costs in areas such as procurement, and overall management inefficiencies.

A long-term CR is potentially problematic for the NSF SBE Directorate in particular. In FY2016, the SBE directorate was singled out for a funding freeze among all of the NSF directorates and agency-wide functions. A long-term CR for NSF would mean that the SBE directorate would be capped at the same level of funding in FY2017 that it received in FY 2015, or three consecutive years at \$272 million, which in and of itself represents only about 4 percent of the agency’s budget. Meanwhile, interdisciplinary initiatives underway at NSF—including, for example, the BRAIN initiative—could suffer. A funding freeze could require NSF to revisit how research dollars are invested across disciplines and directorates, with the potential to negatively affect the important social and behavioral components of research on the brain. In addition, both the House and Senate reports that accompanied the respective FY 17 CJS bills included important

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language affirming the merit review process and the importance of NSF's role in funding research across all disciplines. A long-term CR would mean that this crucial guidance from Congress would not be in effect, while the FY2016 funding freeze for SBE would remain in effect.

Without a funding anomaly, the Census Bureau is also constrained under a CR, forcing delays in key decennial census preparations. Last month, PAA and APC signed a [letter](#) organized by The Census Project, urging the Administration to request an anomaly. The letter notes that maintaining the agency's budget at last year's levels into the second fiscal quarter "will force delays and cutbacks in vital tests, IT systems and operational development, and support activities such as updating the address list and developing an effective communications campaign, putting at great risk the Census Bureau's ability to conduct an accurate enumeration in 2020, especially in historically undercounted communities."

In the field, funding delays and uncertainties caused by a CR affect individuals whose livelihoods depend on the flow of predictable funding cycles--most notably lab and administrative personnel and early stage investigators who, during CRs, are laid off or fired. Ultimately, all Americans, who are relying on scientific research to deliver life-saving treatments and interventions, lose when research personnel and productivity are delayed or discontinued. We hope you will take all of these factors into account as you negotiate a continuing resolution.

Once again, thank you for your leadership on the FY 2017 Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations bill and for considering our views and priorities as you negotiate a final FY 2017 funding measure.

Sincerely,

Judith A. Seltzer  
President, Population Association of America

Lisa Berkman  
President, Association of Population Centers