

# Population Association of America Association of Population Centers

## Office of Government and Public Affairs

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June 16, 2016

Dear Senator,

As you know, the Senate is currently considering H.R. 2578, the Fiscal Year 2017 Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) Appropriations bill. The CJS bill funds the Census Bureau and the National Science Foundation (NSF)--two federal agencies essential to the organizations we represent, the Population Association of America and Association of Population Centers. The Census Bureau provides accessible, accurate, and vital socio-economic and demographic data that population scientists use to study changes in the U.S. population and to inform research and research training activities. The National Science Foundation (NSF) is an important source of federal discretionary grant funding that supports individual research awards, programs and surveys.

During floor debate on H.R. 2578, I understand amendments may be offered that could undermine support or funding from these agencies. I urge you to **OPPOSE** any amendments that would do the following:

### 1) Reduce the Census Bureau's proposed funding level

The Senate bill provides the Census Bureau with \$1.5 billion in FY 2017, which is already \$100 million below the Administration's request. Fiscal Year 2017 is an important year in the "ramp up" to the 2020 Census during which the Bureau will be testing sweeping reforms of census operations, developing IT systems in time for a 2018 end-to-end test, and designing a multi-layered communications program. According to the Census Bureau, investing in Census 2020 preparations now will save the taxpayers \$5 billion over the lifecycle of the next decennial census. Further, this funding will enable the Bureau to implement innovations, including an Internet response option and use of administrative records, to make the next decennial more cost effective and accurate. Further cuts to the agency's budget jeopardize timely, comprehensive final planning and early preparations for Census 2020.

### 2) Undermine the NSF merit review process

The NSF merit review process is considered the gold standard around the world for selecting the most promising scientific research--a process grounded in rigorous examination by subject matter experts drawn from a broad cross-section of the scientific community. Moreover, the mission of NSF is to fund basic research, recognizing that basic research forms the foundation upon which more applied

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solutions can be developed. In response to concerns raised by some in Congress, NSF has worked to ensure that grantees supply research proposal titles and abstracts that, to the greatest extent possible, describe the potential merit of the proposed research in plain English that is accessible to a non-scientific audience. Further congressional efforts to impose restrictions on the merit review process could undermine the quality of the merit review system itself--creating a "chilling effect" whereby peer reviewers become less willing to recommend higher risk/higher reward proposals, or decide not to participate in the system at all for fear of repercussions.

**3) Undermine a fully funded, mandatory American Community Survey (ACS)**

The American Community Survey (ACS) is the nation's only source of comparable (across geography), consistent (across time), timely (updated annually), high quality demographic and socio-economic data for all communities in the United States. With congressional support, in 2005, the ACS replaced the Census long form. Today, ACS data are used by the federal government to determine the allocation of more than \$415 billion annually in federal assistance to states and localities and by data users in the private and public sectors to make key investment and planning decisions. Because the ACS is part of the constitutionally required census, the law requires its response. According to tests conducted by the Census Bureau, making the ACS a voluntary survey would cause mail response rates to plummet (by approximately 20%) and increase the survey's costs by an estimated \$90 to \$100 million a year. More information about the ACS and the implications of making the survey voluntary are available at <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/acs-whyweneedthesurvey-factsheet-march2016.pdf>.

Thank you for considering our views during debate on H.R. 2578.

Sincerely,

Judith A. Seltzer  
President, Population Association of America

Lisa Berkman  
President, Association of Population Centers