American Statistical Association

732 North Washington Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314 USA
(703) 684-1221 ● Fax: (703) 683-2307 ● Email: asainfo@amstat.org
Web site: http://www.amstat.org/

December 11, 2008

The Honorable Carolyn Maloney
The U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Congresswoman Maloney:

On behalf of the American Statistical Association (ASA) Board of Directors, I write to inform you of our endorsement of H.R. 7069, "Restoring the Integrity of American Statistics Act of 2008". In particular, ASA, the nation's foremost and oldest professional society in the field of statistics, strongly supports the provisions to make the Census Bureau independent and to make its directorship a fixed, five-year term. For decades, our members have advanced the statistical science underlying the survey methodology used by the Census Bureau but even the most advanced methodology cannot adequately inform the nation if the Bureau does not operate independently.

The bill's two primary provisions would help to insulate Census Bureau work from partisan pressure, thereby allowing the Bureau to focus solely on the quality of its statistical mission. This independence and impartiality would also allow the Bureau to be more responsive to Congress, the Administration, other agencies, and the users of the Bureau's many products. We also believe that the Census components not directly involved in the decennial census (e.g., its economic programs, continuing demographic surveys, and intercensal estimation programs) will be better served within an independent Bureau.

With 18,000 statisticians as members, ASA leadership believes that an independent Census Bureau – the largest statistics agency in the federal system – is essential to sound and reliable official statistics. Indeed, it sometimes goes unappreciated that the methods used to collect and analyze the data for the myriad Census surveys rely on very advanced statistical methods and that statistics is a rigorous, exacting, computationally intensive science. Like our nation's other science agencies, guaranteeing the independence, in

both fact and in appearance, of all our statistical agencies is crucial to the trust the American people should have of their government.
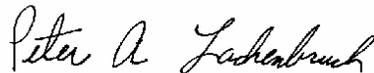
In addition to our support of an independent Census Bureau, we urge that the qualifications of the Director and Deputy Director be detailed and that their offices be given the necessary power to lead the Bureau. The individuals in these positions should be seen as completely objective, primarily interested in producing high quality statistical data; obviously, too, they should have the proper credentials. The operating procedures established for the Bureau's leadership will be fundamental for it to be a successful independent agency.

We recommend that these procedures include guidance for how the Director will deal with Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, the public, other statistical agencies, and the rest of the Administration. The Director must have the responsibility for the budget for the Census Bureau and deal directly with OMB on such matters. Similarly, the Director should take the lead in dealing with the Congress, rather than a Congressional Affairs Office. If there is such an office, it should report to the Director and not be headed by a political appointee. To reflect the director's responsibilities and qualifications, we recommend that the director position be compensated at Level II of the Executive Schedule, rather than Level IV.

Finally, we regard the five-year appointment for the Census director and the stipulation that the director "be appointed without regard to political affiliation and solely on the basis of the professional qualifications" to be an integral part of Census Bureau independence.

On behalf of the American Statistical Association, thank you for your long-time support of the Census Bureau. We look forward to working with you to help make this bill become law in the next Congress.

Sincerely,

Peter A. Lachenbruch