

Sign-on Letter on the American Community Survey

November 20, 2001

Hon. Frank Wolf
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and State,
The Judiciary and Related Agencies
H-309 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Wolf:

We are writing to convey our support for the American Community Survey (ACS), which the U.S. Census Bureau is developing to produce timely information about our nation's people and communities and to focus decennial census efforts on achieving an accurate population count for the distribution of political representation. While there are several design and operational issues the Census Bureau and Congress must address before the ACS is fully implemented, we are encouraged by the promise of more current, and therefore more useful, data to inform policy debates and assess community needs.

The Census Bureau developed the ACS in response to congressional concerns about the length and effect on response rates of the 1990 census long form. The "continuous measurement" design would produce annual estimates of key demographic, economic, and social indicators that guide planning, program administration and evaluation, and investment decisions in the public and private sectors. The ongoing measurement of neighborhood-level characteristics would help decision-makers monitor change over time and anticipate community needs as they emerge. The new program, when fully implemented, also is designed to replace the once-a-decade long form, allowing the Census Bureau to devote more fiscal and human resources to the basic population count in the census.

We urge Congress to fund the ACS at a level that supports final preparations this year and nationwide implementation starting in fiscal year 2003 with a sample of sufficient size to produce accurate community-level information for policy and programmatic purposes. At the same time, Congress should ensure that the ACS plan includes effective outreach and promotional activities, especially aimed at linguistically isolated, low income, and other historically hard-to-reach households in both urban and rural areas. Congress and the Office of Management and Budget also must agree quickly on both the survey's content and the process for determining the subject matters to be covered, with sensitivity to respondent burden and opportunity for content flexibility. That process should offer external stakeholders a chance to review and comment on the proposed topics.

As we chart an economic and social course for our nation in these challenging times, it is more essential than ever to make decisions - at the federal, state, and local levels - that are guided by relevant, accurate, and current data about the needs of our population and the condition of our communities. With a long-term funding commitment from Congress and a scientifically robust, respondent-sensitive design, the American Community Survey represents a cost-effective investment in prudent decision-making and resource allocation that will benefit all communities.

Sincerely,

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