

February 18, 2025

The Honorable Robert Aderholt  
Chair  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education, and  
Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education, and  
Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Chair  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education, and  
Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education, and  
Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Capito, and Ranking Member Baldwin,

We wish to draw your attention to a critical issue threatening our nation's economic statistical infrastructure—one that risks undermining economic decision-making and reducing efficiency in both the public and private sectors. Our federal statistical system is facing severe challenges due to pressing needs to modernize and lack of funds to secure its long-term future.

Federal economic statistics are primarily produced by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and the US Census Bureau. All three agencies have had to reduce or propose cuts to programs or critical surveys as well as defer survey redesigns, transitions to internet data collection, and new products because of declining purchasing power, increasing data purchasing costs, declining response rates, and other challenges. We are gravely concerned that without intervention, these cuts will continue and even worsen, thus endangering our nation's statistical infrastructure.

The statistics provided by these agencies have long been integral to effective governance and policy. Informed changes, including decisions on government budgets and monetary policy, depend heavily on these data. A continued erosion of the quality and availability of economic statistics would harm not only governmental efficiency but also private-sector decision-making, where businesses rely on accurate data to understand economic conditions and create value for millions of Americans. For an assessment of the

health of the entire US statistical system, see this 2024 report, *The Nation's Data at Risk - Meeting America's Information Needs for the 21st Century*.<sup>1</sup>

The statistics produced by these three agencies serve as the private sector's macroeconomic dashboard, offering critical insights into the health of the economy. Government statistics help U.S. companies identify and capitalize on industry trends and anticipate shifts in the behavior of their customers, helping them stay competitive globally. Understanding how the economy is currently performing—and how it may perform in the months and years ahead—shapes a wide range of business operations, from capital expenditures and workforce planning to scenario development and investment strategies. Industry-specific data is particularly valuable for identifying opportunities and addressing challenges within specific sectors, while geography-specific data guides decisions on where to establish new facilities or focus sales efforts. Without timely and accurate economic statistics, the private sector's ability to adapt to changing business conditions and effectively manage risks would be severely hindered.

The BEA had to discontinue in 2024 three statistical products and 24 tables, and delayed another product indefinitely, all due to budgetary pressures:<sup>2</sup> Among the programs cut were new statistics on the digital economy and highly valued near-real-time measures of consumer spending. The BLS announced in June that the sample size for the Current Population Survey – the source of the nation's monthly unemployment statistics – would need to be cut by 8% by the end of 2024 due to lack of funding.<sup>3</sup> While stop-gap funding postponed the cut,<sup>4</sup> the pause will be short lived without additional funding.<sup>5</sup> This reduction would result in less reliable, less certain data, and would reduce the ability to report on employment trends by region.

Federal economic statistics are at risk due to several interconnected factors.<sup>1</sup> First, the production of trusted and timely statistics – which includes being relevant, credible, accurate, and objective – is resource intensive, requiring extensive expertise and experience. Such work cannot be readily outsourced. Second, maintaining production and relevance of these statistics is a never-ending challenge because it entails measuring a constantly evolving economy and workforce in the face of various challenges that require continual research and innovation. Finally, these agencies have all lost purchasing power over the last several years. Since FY16, BEA has lost 16%, BLS, 11%, and the Census Current Surveys account, 5%. In that

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nation's Data at Risk—Meeting American's Information Needs for the 21st Century*. Default. Retrieved January 9, 2025, from <https://www.amstat.org/policy-and-advocacy/the-nation's-data-at-risk-meeting-american's-information-needs-for-the-21st-century>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/near-real-time-spending>; <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/digital-economy>; <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/health-care#>; <https://www.bea.gov/itable/discontinued-data-tables>; <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/integrated-macroeconomic-accounts>

<sup>3</sup> Bloomberg, "BLS Survey Cuts May Blur US Labor-Market Picture," June 26, 2024 (<https://www.piie.com/commentary/op-eds/2024/bls-survey-cuts-may-blur-us-labor-market-picture>).

<sup>4</sup> Bloomberg, "US Government Pauses Plan to Cut Sample of Critical Jobs Survey," November 1, 2024 (<https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/business/company-news/2024/11/01/us-government-pauses-plan-to-cut-sample-of-critical-jobs-survey/>).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-06-07/us-jobs-household-survey-size-to-be-cut-amid-budget-constraints>

time, federal compensation rates have increased 30%.<sup>6</sup> The costs for data purchasing have also been rising. This leads to unwelcome consequences, such as BEA reducing its workforce by 12%, a major factor in its product cuts.

The statistical system clearly has high potential to innovate to meet changing demand for information. For example, statistical agencies reacted quickly after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic to urgent requests for timely data on jobs, health, crime, work locations, and many other important metrics. Congress provided short-term funding for new, high-frequency data, and the statistical system demonstrated its ability to quickly innovate and serve the needs of public and private decision makers.

However, the statistical agencies need sufficient support to be able to carry out plans to modernize their surveys and other statistical products. As noted above, cuts in operations and statistical products are occurring now. Indeed, we run the risk of following other nation's statistical systems into a fraught era of stuttering performance. The UK's current struggles with its employment statistics highlight the risks involved. Sharp declines in response rates for its Labor Force Survey without alternative data sources sufficiently developed and researched raises serious doubts about the quality of the UK employment statistics.<sup>7</sup>

The interconnectedness of these agencies' programs also poses a risk for federal economic statistics. For example, the Census Bureau's business surveys are the primary inputs into BEA's National Income and Product Accounts, as well as its annual input-output tables. BEA's quarterly and annual estimates of Gross Domestic Product, which are among the most closely watched principal indicators of the strength of the U.S. economy, are founded on Census Bureau data. The BLS uses Census data for its estimates of labor productivity, which measure prospects for rising living standards, as well as its Producer Price Indexes (PPI);<sup>8</sup> the PPIs are in turn used by BEA in its estimates of real (inflation-adjusted) GDP.<sup>9</sup> The Federal Reserve Board uses Census Bureau manufacturing data to compile its Index of Industrial Production.<sup>10</sup> In other words, cuts to one agency's programs can have significant downstream effects.

Census programs overall face challenges as a result of its stagnant funding. For example, the agency is depleting resources it needs to conduct the 2027 Economic Census, advance operations supporting the 2030 Decennial Census, and deploy the Data Ingest and Collection for the Enterprise (DICE) program. New initiatives proposed for FY 2025, such as stabilizing and modernizing the Survey of Income and Program Participation and the Population Estimates Program, are also delayed and jeopardized.

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<sup>6</sup> See, [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1\\_xt8ol2neZyTwaZvtyQOtujzuHn jemZPwPuYVsEELr0/edit?gid=131887528#gid=131887528](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1_xt8ol2neZyTwaZvtyQOtujzuHn jemZPwPuYVsEELr0/edit?gid=131887528#gid=131887528), tab 3, line 19.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/09/business/britain-jobs-data.html?searchResultPosition=1>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/opub/hom/pdf/ppi-20111028.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.bea.gov/resources/methodologies/nipa-handbook/pdf/chapter-03.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/g17/lpNotes.htm>

Unless the current trends – i.e., declines in purchasing power and staff – are reversed, we believe these agencies will have to make further cuts because of the labor intensity of their work, the rising costs of data, and mandatory pay raises. The Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE), Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) program, and National Longitudinal Survey are among the BLS programs most at risk. With low and declining response rates, the CE and JOLTS have been proposed for modernization and upgrades to improve timeliness and granularity for several years, but Congress has not funded needed upgrades. As you know, CE is a key input to the Consumer Price Index and Poverty indexes and JOLTS is a measure of the unmet demand for labor and therefore complements the employment rate to provide a better understanding of the US job market dynamics. Such cuts could in turn undermine major economic and policy decisions and raise inefficiency in the public and private sectors.

Thank you for your consideration. Please direct any questions on this letter to American Statistical Association Director of Science Policy Steve Pierson: [spierson@amstat.org](mailto:spierson@amstat.org).

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Access/Macro	Connecticut Voices for Children
American Anthropological Association	The Consortium of Social Science Associations
American Statistical Association	Council for Community and Economic Research
Asian American Federation	Decision Demographics, LLC
Asian American Organizing Project	Economic and Business Research Center, The
Associated General Contractors of America	University of Arizona
Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM)	Economic History Association
Association of Population Centers	Economic Opportunity Institute
Association of Public Data Users	Economic Policy Institute
Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)	Economic Progress Institute
BrightQuery	Economic Roundtable
California - U.S. Census Bureau Federal-State Cooperative for Population Estimates and for Population Projections	Elliott D. Pollack & Co.
California Budget & Policy Center	Employ America
California State Data Center	Globicus Inc.
Caring Across Generations	Haver Analytics
Center for Economic and Policy Research	HousingLink
Center for Employment Equity, University of Massachusetts, Amherst	The HQ Companies, Inc.
Center for Parental Leave Leadership	ICPSR, the data consortium
Center for Rural Policy and Development	Immigration Research Initiative
Center for Workforce Research and Information	The Industry Studies Association
Center NYC Affairs, The New School	Information Technology and Innovation Foundation
	Keystone Research Center
	Kids Forward
	Latent Insights, LLC

Long Beach Alliance for Clean Energy  
 MACS - Minnesotans for the ACS and 2030  
 Census  
 Main Street Project  
 Maine Center for Economic Policy  
 Maine Dept. of Labor  
 Maryland Center on Economic Policy  
 Michigan League for Public Policy  
 Minnesota Compass  
 Missouri Budget Project  
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 Movement Economics  
 National Association for Business Economics  
 National Education Association  
 National Partnership for Women & Families  
 National Retail Federation  
 National Women's Law Center  
 NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
 New Jersey Policy Perspective  
 Numantic Solutions  
 Oklahoma Policy Institute  
 Paraimbal, LLC  
 PHI  
 Policy Matters Ohio  
 Population Association of America  
 Posit Software, PBC.

Pratt Center for Community Development  
 Project On Government Oversight  
 Rebecca Schueller Training & Consulting  
 Recursion  
 Seventh Point Analytic Consulting  
 SocialExplorer Inc.  
 SRR Consulting  
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 Statistics Department, California Polytechnic  
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 Twin Cities Research Group  
 UC Riverside Center for Community Solutions  
 USAFacts  
 VOICES for Alabama's Children  
 The W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment  
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