March 17, 2022

The Honorable Shalanda Young
Director, Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Young,

Congratulations on your Senate Confirmation to be Director. One of the many important functions you oversee is that of the Chief Statistician of the United States. This letter provides some initial suggestions and seeks a meeting to discuss opportunities to strengthen this role for greater effect.

The three of us writing each have filled this position. Based on our collective 30 years of experience in that role, we suggest ways that the position could, without additional legislation, be strengthened to better help the President, you as the Director of OMB, and the nation as a whole. The Chief Statistician generally has had great influence and visibility externally in the data community; it is currently underutilized and under-resourced. The opportunity for significant and lasting improvement is now – both because the position is about to be filled and, in the midst of dealing with the pandemic, inflation, employment, education, and other pressing challenges, having high quality, actionable data that informs public policy is a high priority.

First among the responsibilities of the Chief Statistician is overseeing the production and accessibility of objective, relevant, reliable, and timely statistics that garner the trust of our nation. These statistics are constitutionally required to apportion congressional representation; used to distribute hundreds of billions of federal dollars annually to states, tribes, and localities; and inform discussions ranging from health, energy, and the economy to education and security. While much of the collection, processing, and dissemination of statistics produced by the Federal Government takes place in the dispersed US statistical agencies, establishing priorities and securing budgets for these activities rest in large measure on the Chief Statistician. Likewise, it is the responsibility of OMB and the Chief Statistician to promulgate governmentwide standards that foster comparability and utility of the data; these range from standards that safeguard the autonomy and objectivity of statistics to those that facilitate the use of common classifications to others that ensure equitable access to information.

To carry out these responsibilities, the Chief Statistician has a number of tools, including the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (ICSP). However, the world of data, data science, and information has greatly expanded; accompanying this expansion has been growth in the

number of principals in the Executive Office of the President, as well as in the agencies, who now have roles in ensuring that data being produced and used are meeting standards for quality, objectivity, relevance, and timeliness. The Chief Statistician must be centrally involved in OMB and EOP Councils and fora playing related key roles. Moreover, the Chief Statistician needs the power to command expertise from agencies or otherwise attain the competencies to carry out the authorities mandated by the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) and the Evidence Act.

The recent Evidence Act extends the responsibilities of the Chief Statistician to chair the OMB Advisory Committee on Data for Evidence Building, oversee expansion of the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy, and issue guidance and regulations on the various provisions of the act. It also complements, extends, and reinforces authorities provided in the PRA and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (originally Title V of the 2002 E-Government Act). These roles are in addition to other broad duties/functions of the Chief Statistician, for example, coordinating US participation in international statistical activities and reviewing/approving agency information collection requests, responsibilities that extend back to the establishment of the Chief Statistician role in the 1930s.

The need to strengthen the ability of the Chief Statistician to fulfill myriad roles and responsibilities is not new; but the urgency of doing so has become ever greater. There are many ways OMB could consider empowering the position. We would be pleased to discuss various approaches – and their respective advantages and disadvantages – with you at your convenience.
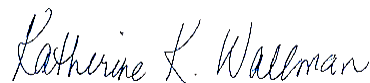
We are gratified to have the backing of the overwhelming majority of living former principal federal statistical agency heads – both those who served as career appointees and those who were presidentially appointed. Their endorsement represents the importance of the Chief Statistician to the federal statistical system and the broad support for strengthening the position.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Hermann Habermann (1988-1992)   Nancy Potok (2017-2020)

Katherine Wallman (1992-2017)

CC: Dominic Mancini, Deputy Administrator, Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Management and Budget

Former heads of principal federal statistical agencies:

Katharine Abraham, Commissioner, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1993-2001

Vince Barabba, Director, U.S. Census Bureau, 1973-1976, 1979-1981

Jack Buckley, Commissioner, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009-2013

Lynda Carlson, Director, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2000-2012

Carol Carson, Director, Bureau of Economic Analysis, 1992-1995

Guy Caruso, Administrator, Energy Information Administration, 2002-2008

Bruce Chapman, Director, U.S. Census Bureau, 1981-1983

Cynthia Clark, Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2008-2014

Steven Dillingham, Director, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1990-1992; Director, Bureau of
        Transportation Statistics, 2007-2010; Director, U.S. Census Bureau, 2019-2021

Emerson Elliott, Commissioner, National Center for Education Statistics, 1984-1995

Katherine Smith Evans, Administrator, Economic Research Service, USDA, 2007 – 2011

Manning Feinleib, Director, National Center for Health Statistics, 1983-1995

John Gawalt, Director, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2013-2018

Lawrence Greenfeld, Director, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002-2006

Erica L. Groshen, Commissioner, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013-2017

Robert Groves, Director, U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2012

Jay E. Hakes, Administrator, Energy Information Administration, 1993-2000

Keith Hall, Commissioner, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008-2012

Calvin Kent, Administrator, Energy Information Administration, 1990-1994

J. Steven Landefeld, Director, Bureau of Economic Analysis, 1995-2014

James Lynch, Director, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010-2012

Richard Newell, Administrator, Energy Information Administration, 2009-2011

Susan Offutt, Administrator, Economic Research Service, USDA, 1996 – 2006

Thomas Petska, Director, Statistics of Income, 2002-2009

Susan Boehmer Powers, Director, Statistics of Income, 2010-2014

Kenneth Prewitt, Director, U.S. Census Bureau, 1998-2000

Joseph Reilly, Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2014-2018

Martha Farnsworth Riche, Director, U.S. Census Bureau, 1994-1998

Philip L. Rones, Acting Commissioner, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006-2008

Charles Rothwell, Director, National Center for Health Statistics, 2013-2018

William J. Sabol, Director, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015-2016

Fritz Scheuren, Director, Statistics of Income, 1980-1994

Jeffrey l. Sedgwick, Director, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006-2008

Ashish Sen, Director, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 1998-2002

Adam Sieminski, Administrator, Energy Information Administration, 2012-2017

Edward Sondik, Director, National Center for Health Statistics, 1997-2013

John Thompson, Director, U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017

Kathleen Utgoff, Commissioner, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002-2006

James Woodworth, Commissioner, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018-2021