

WHAT IF THE CENSUS BUREAU STOPS COUNTING AFTER FEWER THAN A THIRD OF ALL HOUSEHOLDS RESPOND?*

*That's what the House FY 2026 CJS appropriations bill proposes!

Sec. 605 of the House FY 2026 Commerce, Justice, and Science (CJS) appropriations bill states: "None of the funds in this Act may be used to enforce involuntary compliance, or to inquire more than twice for voluntary compliance with any survey conducted by the Bureau of the Census."

Section 605 is a misguided idea, with alarming consequences, which our democracy and economy cannot afford. The House should strike it from the CJS appropriations bill. Section 605 is an unvetted, untested, and extreme provision that would change the way the U.S. Census Bureau conducts virtually every census, demographic survey, and economic survey. It would force the Census Bureau to stop contacting households and businesses after two attempts to secure a response in every census and survey, no matter how low the response rate.

Here are some of the most dire consequences of section 605:

The enactment of section 605 would lead to lower response rates on Census Bureau surveys, thereby disrupting the collection of foundational statistics that support our democracy and economy. **Without sufficiently high response rates in many communities, the Census Bureau might not be able to publish *any* data of acceptable quality and reliability for those areas.**

Irreplaceable censuses and surveys that would be affected include:

- **The constitutionally-required decennial census.** In the 2020 Census, after two inquiries (i.e. contacts) with most households (primarily by mail and in-person census packet delivery), less than 30 percent had self-responded!
- **The American Community Survey (ACS)** is an ongoing part of the decennial census that helps Congress allocate federal funds fairly and prudently. On average, the ACS requires more than three tries to secure a response.
- **The Current Population Survey (CPS)** and Labor Department data provide inputs to the monthly labor force statistics (e.g., unemployment rate) that drive the direction of financial markets, business decisions, and the U.S. economy overall. On average, the CPS requires more than 2.5 tries to secure a response.
- **The Economic Census**, which is conducted by law every five years, is the official measure of U.S. businesses and their activities. The data are the benchmark for our national economic indicators, including Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the Producer Price Index (PPI). Low response rates will reduce the Census Bureau's ability to produce critical data such as GDP and PPI.

Communities for which data might **not be available** include:

- Rural and less populated communities
- Most American Indian reservations, tribal lands, and Alaska Native villages
- People with disabilities and veterans in many smaller communities such as rural towns, urban neighborhoods, and remote regions

DID YOU KNOW?

Why did Congress make response to the 10-year census, ACS, and Economic Census mandatory?

- Throughout our nation's history, Congress has recognized that an accurate census and statistics about our population and communities are essential to maintaining a strong democracy and supporting prudent, evidence-based decision-making.
- Requiring responses to the nation's most vital surveys helps ensure the collection of sufficient information to produce statistically valid data for every state, locality, rural community, tribal area, and neighborhood, as well as for all population groups, such as veterans, older Americans, and people with disabilities.
- Previous Census Bureau tests and Canada's 2011 experience in making its equivalent of the ACS voluntary suggest that 40 percent of U.S. counties could be left with *no ACS data* if responses to the survey were voluntary instead of mandatory.