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May 12, 2026

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chairman

Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Grace Meng
Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Meng,

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 240 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States, and our Census Task Force co-chairs, Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC and NALEO Educational Fund, we write to oppose the current Fiscal Year 2027 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies ("CJS") appropriations bill. The bill slashes the president's budget request for the Census Bureau by over \$500 million, or over 25%, despite the critical need for funding to prepare for the 2030 Census, as we enter the stage where funding has historically ramped up in order to adequately prepare. The bill also unconstitutionally prohibits the Census Bureau from counting undocumented immigrants as part of the decennial census apportionment determinations, while simultaneously sharply restricting the Bureau's ability to follow-up with households and businesses that have not responded to censuses and surveys, all but ensuring the 2030 Census will continue to show undercounts of at-risk communities, leading to inaccurate results.

The Census Bureau is the nation's principal statistical agency, producing demographic and economic data to inform critical investment and planning decisions in the public, private, and non-profit sectors and ensure fair representation and equitable distribution of federal resources. As such, the Census Bureau must receive the necessary funds and maintain operational latitude to conduct censuses and surveys using scientifically proven methods that will ensure sufficient response in all communities and sectors being measured, to produce data that meet quality standards. This principle must apply to the Census Bureau's many critical and varied demographic and economic surveys, including the decennial census, American Community Survey (ACS), Economic Census, and Current Population Survey. Of particular importance is a population census that counts every person living in the United

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States, regardless of their citizenship and immigration status, as the U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment requires. As it stands, the CJS bill before the House Appropriations Committee wholly undermines an inclusive, cost-effective, and accurate 2030 Census on three fronts:

I. Inadequate Funding

FY 2027 is pivotal in the ramp-up to the 2030 Census, as preparations must exponentially increase at this point in the decade to ensure an accurate, cost-effective, and thorough decennial census. Sound investments now will help to ensure the future success and cost efficiency of the 2030 Census. In FY27, the Bureau must analyze the results of the 2026 Census Test, conduct final testing of specific census operations and methods, prepare for the 2028 Dress Rehearsal, refine cost models and workforce estimates, create its communications program, and start the Local Update of Census Addresses operation—among other decennial activities. In addition, the Bureau needs robust funding to sustain and enhance the ACS, the official, trusted, and public source of accurate demographic, socioeconomic, and housing data used by governments, businesses, and the nonprofit sector across the nation.

The bill cuts funding that is necessary for these essential decennial census programs. Short-changing funding for 2030 Census preparations introduces greater risk to a successful count. It also undermines cost-effectiveness by hampering census testing and increasing the risk of unplanned changes. To fund the decennial census and other critical Census Bureau activities for FY 2027, we urge the committee to meet, or ideally exceed the president's proposed Census Bureau funding level of \$2.0115 billion.

II. Section 553

A fair and accurate census and the collection of valuable, objective data about the nation's people, housing, economy, and communities are among the most significant civil rights issues facing the country today. Every census since the first enumeration in 1790 has included citizens and non-citizens for the purpose of congressional apportionment. In the current version of the CJS appropriations bill, section 553 requires the Census Bureau to exclude undocumented persons living in the United States from the state population totals used to apportion seats to the U.S. House of Representatives after each census.

Throughout the nation's history, Republican and Democratic administrations alike have concluded that excluding undocumented immigrants and non-citizens from the apportionment base would be unconstitutional and contrary to the 14th Amendment's clear command to count the "whole number of persons in each State."

While the constitutional infirmity of section 553 cannot be overcome, asking about immigration status in the census—which would be required to meet such a directive—is unnecessarily intrusive. It would raise concerns among all respondents—both native-born and immigrant—about the confidentiality and privacy of information provided to the government. As prior research and Census Bureau experience have demonstrated, this will have a chilling effect on participation and keep many residents from responding, jeopardizing the accuracy of the census in every state and community. We urge the committee to remove section 553 from the CJS appropriations bill.

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III. Section 579

The CJS bill includes another damaging provision, Section 579, which obstructs the Census Bureau's ability to collect data by restricting follow-up activities using any contact mode (including by mail, telephone, and in-person visit), fundamentally changing the way the Bureau conducts virtually every census, demographic survey, and economic survey. In practice, Section 579 will 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 at that time.

For example, in the 2020 Census, after two contacts with most households to invite and encourage response (which is mandatory under federal law), the national response rate stood at around 50 percent. The rate was even lower in many communities, including some rural communities, historically undercounted neighborhoods, and on American Indian reservations. If Congress enacts section 579, the Census Bureau would be prohibited from any further outreach to nonresponding households. Even if general advertising and promotion prompted some additional responses, the Bureau would likely not have collected enough responses in many areas to produce statistically valid results, jeopardizing congressional apportionment and redistricting, as well as the allocation of vital federal assistance to states, localities, and Tribal Nations.

If enacted, section 579 would threaten the integrity of the decennial census, ACS, Current Population Survey, Economic Census, and many other surveys, all of which produce data that are fundamental to the functioning of the federal legislative and executive branches of government, as well the nation's economy. We urge the committee to strike section 579 from the CJS bill.

For these reasons, we strongly urge your committee to increase Census Bureau funding to meet or exceed the president's requested level, and to remove Sections 553 and 579 from the CJS appropriations bill. Thank you for considering our views as you move toward completing the FY 2027 CJS appropriations bill. If you have any questions, please contact Meeta Anand, senior program director of census and data equity at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, at anand@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
NALEO Educational Fund

cc:

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives