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CENSUS APPROPRIATIONS ADVOCACY: A SURGICAL STRATEGY



This case is an in-depth look at efforts to advocate for federal appropriations to support a fair and accurate 2020 Census. The case is one of two such products; the other explores advocacy against inclusion of a citizenship question. While these cases stand alone, they can also be understood within results from [the evaluation](#) of the multi-year national initiative of the Census Subgroup, a part of the Democracy Funders Collaborative.

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Overview

“We went up against an administration’s proposed budget year after year that came in much lower than we felt it should be, and we were able to advocate for a higher number that reflected what we felt and the community felt, the Census Bureau needed and emerged with higher numbers.”

—Census Advocate

Under challenging circumstances, a group of census advocates increased the federal funding allocated for the Census Bureau and the 2020 Census over the administration request for each of three fiscal years (FY 2018–2020). Census appropriations advocacy is annual and ongoing. It is wonky and requires an understanding of the appropriations process and key members of Congress and their staff, as well as the Census Bureau, its operations, the decennial census, and the American Community Survey (ACS). The problem of the underfunding of the Census Bureau extended back a decade and the congressionally imposed mandate to spend no more on the 2020 Census than the 2010 Census (about \$13 billion). One advocate described the funding challenge they were faced with as “filling big gaps and playing catchup.” The timing of the funding was also a challenge. Funding for the census needed to increase with each year, and historically funding for the decennial census has at least doubled between the years ending in “9” and “0,” with roughly half of the lifecycle (10-year) cost of a census spent in the census year. Yet Congress continued to cut the Bureau’s budget request almost every year until FY 2018.¹ In the end, while the funding was late, advocates succeeded in increasing the census budget for three consecutive years as summarized in the table of Census Bureau appropriations that follow (Table 1).

Table 1 | Census Bureau Appropriations, FY2016-2020²

FY		Administration Request	House Passed	Senate Committee Reported	Enacted
2016	Census Bureau	\$1.50 billion	\$992 million	\$1.13 billion	\$1.37 billion
	2020 Census	\$663 million			\$599 million
2017	Census Bureau	\$1.63 billion	\$1.47 billion	\$1.52 billion	\$1.47 billion
	2020 Census	\$778 million			\$767 million
2018	Census Bureau	\$1.50 billion	\$1.51 billion	\$1.52 billion	\$2.81 billion
	2020 Census	\$800 million			\$2.09 billion
2019	Census Bureau	\$3.80 billion	\$4.78 billion	\$3.82 billion	\$3.82 billion
	2020 Census	\$3.02 billion			\$3.02 billion
2020	Census Bureau	\$6.15 billion	\$8.45 billion	\$7.56 billion	\$7.6 billion
	2020 Census	\$5.30 billion			\$6.7 billion

¹ Terri Ann Lowenthal, "Census Update," Funders Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP), January 31, 2017, <https://funderscommittee.org/resource/census-policy-update-whats-in-store-for-2017/>.

² Data for this table was gathered from the Congressional Research Service appropriations budget analysis.

Advocacy was focused on increasing census funding as well as defending against the inclusion of negative or harmful legislative language and protecting against the raiding of the census budget. Legislators often view the census budget as an available source of resources, arguing that the Bureau will not need the money until decennial census preparations begin. “That has always been a vulnerability of the census, which is why the role of advocates has been so important because the census isn’t really its best advocate,” explained one advocate. “The Census Bureau doesn’t have a whole lot of juice as an agency, and it is subject to the whim of the Department of Commerce and how much of a priority Commerce is going to give the Bureau as a parent agency to protect its budget.”

This case describes how a coalition of nonprofit organizations working as part of a broader collaborative played a central role in putting necessary federal census funding back on track. It highlights the advocacy efforts during three critical fiscal years from 2018–2020. The case is organized into four sections:

- **The Advocates**—A description of the core group of advocacy organizations, their partners, and how they organized their collaboration
- **Appropriations Advocacy**—An overview of the appropriations process and the key strategies advocates used
- **Spending Limits and Underfunding**—The context and events that led to the downward funding trend
- **Continuing Resolutions and Government Shutdowns**—A detailed description of the key events surrounding the appropriations process for each of the fiscal years from 2018-2020



The Advocates



“It was a very heavy lift on the part of advocates and an enormously successful lift.”

—*Census Advocate*

The census and the federal appropriations process are two niche complicated policy areas. Organizations with expertise at the intersection of these issues were limited. A small interconnected group of long-term census advocates supported by expert census consultants came together to advocate for adequate 2020 Census funding. A standing table called the Hill Strategy Group, led by The Leadership Conference, created the infrastructure for collaboration on a shared strategy. One member explained the value of the Hill Group this way, “Appropriations is a very wonky topic that not many people work on but it was a huge success for us, and the Hill Strategy Group served to connect all the advocates together in ways that served us well and continue to serve us well to this day.” Following are the core members of the Hill Strategy Group that led the census appropriations advocacy.

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights: A coalition of more than 210 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, among which is a fair and accurate census. The Leadership Conference Census Task Force, cochaired by National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund and Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAJC), has a long record of first-hand experience working in support of previous censuses. The Leadership Conference had also formed the Census Counts Campaign, a national hub on census information for state and local organizations that was leveraged to mobilize organizations in support of census funding. Using the Task Force and the Census Counts Campaign as the foundation, The Leadership Conference’s Corrine Yu helped convene the small group of census advocates. In addition, Terri Ann Lowenthal, an expert on the census and issues affecting federal statistics, former co-director of The Census Project, and former staff director of the House Census Oversight Subcommittee, was a consultant to The Leadership Conference.

National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials NALEO Educational Fund: A national organization that facilitates the full participation of Latinos in the American political process, from citizenship to public service. NALEO’s board and constituency encompass the nation’s more than 6,700 Latino elected and appointed officials and include Republicans, Democrats, and independents. NALEO and its chief executive officer, Arturo Vargas, have a long history of working on census outreach, community education, and policy development. Vargas served on the U.S. Census Bureau’s national advisory committees from 2000 through 2019 and is the cochair of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights’ Census Task Force and the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda’s Census Task Force.

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC: A national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization focused on advancing the civil and human rights of Asian Americans. The census and the ACS are the backbone of its mission. To that end, the organization has a permanent census program that monitors census policy, educates policy makers, and conducts community outreach and education on the surveys conducted by the Census Bureau. Advancing Justice | AAJC has also served as a member of numerous advisory committees to the Census Bureau since 2000, including most recently, the National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic and Other Populations.

The Census Project: A broad-based nonpartisan coalition of over 700 national, state, and local organizations that support an inclusive and accurate 2020 Census and ACS. The Census Project tracks census appropriations activities. The organization is currently led by two part-time co-directors: Mary Jo Hoeksema, a Democrat, and Howard Fienberg, a Republican, with extensive legislative and government experience; their nonpartisan leadership provides the coalition with relationships and networks on both sides of the aisle and with a range of stakeholders that includes academia, government, labor, and business. The Census Project’s Advisory Committee includes many of its partner advocacy organizations: Arturo Vargas from NALEO, Terry Minnis from Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, and Corrine Yu from The Leadership Conference.

National Urban League (Urban League): A nonpartisan, nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to the economic empowerment of African Americans and other underserved populations that works through a network of 90 affiliates across 36 states and the District of Columbia, and a Washington bureau. The Urban League had contracted with Jeri Green, a former Census Bureau senior advisor for Civic Engagement; Marc Morial, Urban League’s CEO, is a former mayor with many congressional relationships.

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer: An international law firm with a governmental affairs shop in Washington, DC, was hired to provide strategy and advocacy support for reaching Republican legislators.³ They were selected by census advocates at the suggestion of the national census funders to increase advocacy capacity.

Akin Gump was represented by Hunter Bates, Sen. Mitch McConnell’s former chief of staff, and Ed Pagano, Sen. Patrick Leahy’s former chief of staff. One advocate described them as “A very formidable team, very savvy political strategists and that was really critical.” Their team also included the former policy director at the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), who provided important connections to tribes and senators in states with large tribal populations. Akin Gump also supported business outreach along with Council for a Strong America and Howard Fienberg from The Census Project.

³ The addition of the Akin Gump team was supported with funding provided by a census pooled fund housed at New Venture Fund.

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP): A nonpartisan research and policy institute with deep expertise in budget and appropriations issues. As an organization that worked on a broad range of appropriations issues, CBPP helped provide the “big picture” on appropriations and was able to leverage its Hill contacts with appropriators and Democratic leadership to help get and keep census issues on their radar. CBPP research team provided critical analyses that helped to bolster advocacy efforts.

National Congress of Americans Indians (NCAI): NCAI is the oldest, largest, and most representative national organization serving the broad interests of tribal nations and communities. NCAI had important bipartisan relationships and support from Republicans in both houses of Congress.

Other participants in the Hill Strategy Group included SEIU, NETWORK, ACLU, Council for a Strong America, and Common Cause.



Appropriations Advocacy



“Every year, every year was a new battle.”

—*Census Advocate*

The annual appropriations process unfolds within the same framework every year; however, the politics and external circumstances can vary with each year. For example, sometimes a president’s budget request serves as a general starting point for the Budget and Appropriations Committees, while in other years, a president’s budget is considered “dead on arrival,” especially if Congress and the White House are controlled by different political parties. The annual appropriations advocacy for fiscal years 2017–2020 faced more challenges than usual, with a Republican-controlled Congress until 2019; a new administration; the politization of the census; contentious appropriations cycles with multiple continuing resolutions; delayed funding bills; debates over southern border “wall” funding that stalled the appropriations process; and two government shut downs—one of which lasted for an historic 35 days. These factors contributed to what one advocate described as “a fundamentally broken appropriations process.” All of these factors also contributed dangerous uncertainty to the census planning process.⁴

Appropriations advocacy strategies and tactics are generally consistent and organized around the appropriations process and timeline, although the timeline frequently fluctuates (see Figure 1 for Appropriations Process Overview). One advocate summarized it this way, “These are the steps we take every year regardless of what year it is. We engage in these activities to arrive at the number, to get support for the number, and to communicate the funding recommendation broadly.” The advocacy for the Census Bureau’s budget occurred over the course of the decade and increased in intensity in 2017. For an overarching timeline of key events from 2016 – 2019 see Table 3. What follows is a description of some of critical steps or tactics census advocates used in their annual appropriations work over three fiscal years (FY2018–2020).

- **Funding recommendations are developed in collaboration with stakeholders in response to the president’s budget.** The Census Project and The Leadership Conference provided a budget analysis, identified needed targeted investments, and developed an overall funding recommendation.
- **Working with the Census Bureau.** Advocacy with the Bureau is ongoing, and the relationships built through this work with professional, nonpolitical staff informed appropriations advocacy. Advocates worked with the Census Bureau to develop a deeper understanding of the administration’s budget request and inform the stakeholder funding recommendations. Advocates were an important voice on behalf of the Census Bureau’s budget.

⁴ Terri Ann Lowenthal, "Census Update," Funders Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP), January 31, 2017, <https://funderscommittee.org/resource/census-policy-update-whats-in-store-for-2017/>.

Appropriations is an annual cycle that involves three key steps:

1. **The president budget request**—The process is publicly kicked off with release of the president’s budget request to Congress, usually in early February. The process truly starts around eight months earlier as agencies develop budget proposals and submit them to the White House for possible inclusion in the president’s budget request to Congress.
2. **Congressional budget resolution**—Congress responds with the creation of concurrent budget resolutions, setting discretionary funding levels and caps for the next fiscal year. These budget resolutions originate in the respective budget committees in each chamber and must be approved by the whole chamber. Resolutions are intended to be filed by April 15, but since 1977, Congress has rarely met this date; in some years, one or both chambers has failed to enact a budget resolution altogether. The resolution’s key purpose is to set the level (also known as the 302(a) allocation), caps, and broad priorities for discretionary funding for the next fiscal year, which represents the whole funding pool.
 - **Appropriations bills**—The funding process then moves to the appropriations committees in each chamber. After each committee receives its 302(a) allocation on spending, they create 302(b) allocations for each subcommittee, essentially divvying up the pie among twelve funding accounts, each covered by a separate appropriations bill. The Census Bureau is covered by the Commerce, Justice, and Science and Related Agencies bill.
 - The various subcommittees divide their respective 302(b) allocations across the agencies and programs under their authority. This process includes public hearings and testimony by secretaries and agency heads on their budget request. Committee staff also meet with advocates of the programs; members of Congress submit their own priorities as well.
 - The subcommittee produces a draft appropriations bill (called a “mark”) that is voted on by the subcommittee. If it passes, the bill is taken up by the full appropriations committee, often with amendments. The process is identical in both chambers but often involves different 302(b) allocations, as well as different funding recommendations for agencies and programs.
 - Each chamber considers all twelve bills, which sometimes are combined into three or four “mini-bus” packages. Once a bill (alone or in combination) passed both chambers, members of the relevant subcommittees negotiate their differences to produce a “conference bill,” which then must pass each chamber again before being sent to the White House for the president’s signature. The goal is to enact all twelve bills by the start of the fiscal year, October 1.
3. **Continuing resolutions (CR)** are bills that keep agencies funded if one or more appropriations bills are not signed into law by October 1. They typically maintain the previous year’s funding levels and can last for a few days, weeks, or months.

Source: Center on Policy and Budget Priorities and Congressional Research Service

Advocates also monitored 2020 Census research, testing, and planning over the course of the decade. Understanding of the Bureau, its operations, the census, and the ACS and other surveys was fundamental to census advocacy. One advocate summed it up this way: “You need good analysis. You need good information. You need a good understanding of the census process itself. You need an ability to hold the Bureau accountable to things that it has said . . . being able to have the expertise to be on top of the details and being able to get in the weeds on this stuff.”

- **Developing a bipartisan strategy.** Advocates needed to build support for adequate funding every year on both sides of the aisle. They had a three-pronged strategy: (1) identify Democratic leaders that could speak out about the need for funding; (2) shore up Democratic support to prevent commonplace efforts to shift money from the Census Bureau to other priority programs; and (3) soften Republican opposition and/or identify any potential Republican champions. (See Table 2 for a listing of key legislators and committees that were the focus of the advocacy.)

The new collaboration with Akin Gump provided increased reach and capacity to build Republican support. Akin Gump had relationships with Republicans and as a large firm, also had capacity and staff to track activities on the Hill. “They were a great thought partner, but certainly within the Republican party they had insights that most of us would never have been able to get,” explained one of the civil rights organizations. The strategy also included outreach to Republican governors from red and purple states projected to gain and lose seats in reapportionment. Council for a Strong America was also able to leverage relationships in Alabama, a target state given the important role of Senate Appropriations chair Richard Shelby.

- **Making the business case.** Building the business sector base of support was an important parallel process that was at the core of Republican outreach. The business sector was best reached through a focus on business uses of census data.

Separate processes and sign-on letters were created to develop a bright line between business and nonprofit stakeholders. Business sign-on letters were narrowly crafted to speak to business issues and concerns, although some influential business and industry associations also were willing to join the wider, diverse group of stakeholders on letters advocating for sufficient annual funding for the census and Census Bureau.

To further elevate their collective voice, a Business for the 2020 Census Task Force was formed that was comprised of over 70 executives and senior leaders from major companies as well as national, state, and local business membership organizations. They made the case that an unreliable 2020 Census would have harmful effects on businesses and the American economy, which would persist into the future.⁵

⁵ Business for the 2020 Census. June 18, 2019, <https://strongnation.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/654/525611bc-0e4c-4bcf-82f5-5fc8ebf26735.pdf?1562592467&inline;%20filename=%22FY20%20Census%20Approps%20Business%20Sign-on%20Letter.pdf%22>.

- **Working with key congressional committees of jurisdiction.** Annual meetings with key members of the House and Senate appropriations committees took place in advance of votes on the Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) appropriations bill, although in some years, one committee (usually the Senate) failed to act on the bill. Throughout the process, advocates track the bills from the subcommittees to the markup and to the floor. The Census Project and The Leadership Conference alerted stakeholders to troubling amendments that may arise for action, including efforts to address census policy issues through appropriations amendments. “We are always keeping our eye on the bill, how the CJS bill is moving through the process, if we need to engage and make our members aware and what actions we need to take, which typically takes the form of more sign-on letters or working with our colleagues to set up meetings, help place op-eds in strategic members’ districts,” explained one of the Hill Strategy Group members.

The Hill Strategy Group worked with the leadership and staff of the key appropriations committees to make sure they were well versed on the census and getting accurate information. They coordinated closely with appropriations staff to convey information about whether the administration’s request was insufficient, where the Bureau needed more resources, and what the Bureau could do with those resources. In some instances, they advocated for the inclusion of report language that directed the allocation of resources for specific activities, as one advocate explained. “At times it was specific to the point of having Congress include report language of how they expected money to be spent, on the partnership program, on the communications program, and other things that supported the actual enumeration process.”

- **Sign-on letters are utilized throughout the appropriations process to show support from a variety of stakeholders.** The stakeholder funding recommendation became the basis of sign-on letters that The Census Project and The Leadership Conference drafted, with the Project and The Leadership Conference circulating the letter to thousands of local, state, and national stakeholder organizations to endorse the funding recommendation. Those letters were also used as leverage to request meetings with congressional staff and make them aware of the funding recommendation. At key moments, The Leadership Conference and The Census Project sent letters to Democratic and Republican leadership (the “Four Corners”) who were the final negotiators.
- **“Dear Colleague” letters are utilized at key junctures in the appropriations process.** The Census Project took the lead on working with champions in the House and Senate who did not serve on the appropriations committees on the development of Dear Colleague letters. The member or a group of members sent the letters to their colleagues seeking signers for letters to their respective appropriations committees with a funding request on behalf of the Census Bureau.
- **Research was used to help advocates make the case for adequate annual census funding.** An important piece of research that was widely used was “Counting for Dollars 2020,”⁶ a project developed by Andrew Reamer at George Washington University that helped lawmakers understand

⁶ Andrew Reamer. Counting for Dollars 2020: The Role of the Decennial Census in the Geographic Distribution of Federal Funds, <https://gwipp.gwu.edu/counting-dollars-2020-role-decennial-census-geographic-distribution-federal-funds>.

how census data informed federal funding decisions and the distribution of federal resources, as well as the impact of the census on their state and why a fair and accurate census was important. The research supported advocates' narrative on what would happen if the Bureau didn't have the resources to do the job right. The Center for Urban Research of the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center developed an [interactive map of hard-to-count communities](#) that was used to show congressional representatives areas in their districts and states that were at risk of undercounting based on key demographic and economic characteristics. Additionally, topical reports produced by Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality on how the census is used in education, health, and other issues were also used to help make the case. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities created charts and graphs that were widely used by stakeholders and cited in the media.

- **Communications strategies advanced a variety messages tailored to different audiences on the Hill.** These messages included the need to count historically undercounted communities; the implications of an undercount everywhere; the risk of being penny wise and pound foolish; and ensuring the Census Bureau had the resources it needed to do the job right. Specific messages also focused on the proposed funding levels being far below traditional levels; the negative impact of an inaccurate census on states and localities; the need for accurate census data for the fair distribution of political representation; and the business sector's need for accurate census data. The Leadership Conference, with help from the Hill Strategy Group, provided talking points, published op-eds, organized press calls, and engaged in reporter education to help shape the narrative.
- **Outside mobilization strategy.** Appropriations advocacy often is an insider's ballgame; however, mobilization of organizations and constituents was an important strategy at key moments in the process and in targeted states. Using messaging that was developed by The Leadership Conference with help from the Hill Strategy Group, many of the advocacy organizations, such as NALEO, AAJC, The Census Project, the Urban League, and The Leadership Conference, had networks of organizations that they mobilized on appropriations advocacy. For example, The Leadership Conference's Census Counts Campaign created messages that could be tailored along with graphics for use in social media, along with the hashtag: FundTheCensus.

Additionally, the growing ecosystem of organizations working on the 2020 Census and supported by a collaborative of funders provided a larger base of support for census advocacy. These organizations were engaged through the Census Counts Campaign and various listservs and urgent actions on appropriations. National organizations, affiliates, and constituents from key districts were organized to participate in Hill Days to meet with key congressional representatives. Census Counts and The Leadership Conference organized dozens of Hill meetings. "We had people come in from around the country, and we were strategic in targeting the districts of appropriators. We had them talk to these appropriators about the importance of funding for the census," explained one advocate. For example, NALEO organized their local elected officials to speak with key congressional leaders about the importance of the census for state and local jurisdictions. "We created talking points for advocates so they could do their own letters, which they could use in

meetings with legislators. We pulled together a few advocacy days where we brought in state groups and set up a whole bunch of meetings with their members so they could talk census because members always like hearing from their constituents.” One advocate reported that a common refrain from congressional representatives was, “No one ever comes in and talks to me about the census.”

Table 2 | Congressional Outreach*

<i>Congressional Committee</i>	<i>Leadership</i>
Senate and House Appropriations Full Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairman Sen. Richard Shelby (R-AL) • Ranking Member Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT) • Chairwoman Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY) • Ranking Member Rep. Kay Granger (R-TX)
Senate Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairman Jerry Moran (R-KS) • Ranking Member Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)
House Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairman José Serrano (D-NY) • Ranking Member Robert Aderholt (R-AL)
Congressional Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) • Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) • House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) • House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) • House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD)
The House Committee on Oversight and Reform, which oversees the Census Bureau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) • Ranking Member Jim Jordan (R-OH) • Rep. Jamie Raskin (D-MD), chair, Civil Right and Civil Liberties Subcommittee • Rep Gerald Connolly (D-VA), chair, Government Operations Subcommittee
Legislators that are leaders on tribal issues including members of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sen. John Hoeven (R-ND) (SIAC chairman) • Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS) • Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) • Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK)
<p>*Note: This reflects leadership for the 116th Congress (2019–2020) after the Democrats took control of the House in the 2018 midterm elections and prior to the 2020 elections when the Democrats gained narrow control of the Senate.</p>	

Table 3 | Timeline of Key Events

2016

<i>September</i>	Congress failed to pass the 2017 budget on time and froze Census Bureau spending at 2016 levels.
<i>October 18</i>	Census Bureau announced cancellation of the 2017 Census tests in Puerto Rico, the Standing Rock Reservation in North and South Dakota, and the Colville Reservation and off-reservation trust land in Washington State.
<i>November</i>	Election of Trump and a new administration bring further funding uncertainty for the 2020 Census, coinciding with a critical four-year time span in which the Census Bureau had to finalize and operationalize the census design, develop a complex IT architecture, prepare for a massive communications campaign and field operations, and then implement the count.

2017

<i>February</i>	GAO report and testimony declaring the 2020 Census “High Risk.”
<i>May 5</i>	FY 2017 Consolidated Appropriations Act (H.R. 244) signed into law providing the Census Bureau with \$1.47 Billion, a 7.3% increase over FY16, lower than the \$1.6 billion Obama administration request.
<i>May 15</i>	John Thompson announces he is stepping down as the Census Bureau director.
<i>May 23</i>	Administration releases FY 2018 budget proposal, which requests \$1.5 billion for the Census Bureau.
<i>November</i>	Administration’s revised FY 2018 request to provide an additional \$187 million for Census 2020 preparation, mostly to support IT systems development.

2018

<i>Jan. 20-22</i>	Government shutdown stemming from dispute over extension of status of persons affected by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and border wall funding.
<i>February 12</i>	Administration releases FY 2019 budget proposal, which includes \$3.8 billion for the Census Bureau.
<i>March 23</i>	FY 2018 Consolidated Appropriations bill (H.R. 1625) signed into law, providing the Bureau with \$2.8 billion.
<i>March 26</i>	U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross announces he will add a question to the 2020 Census asking residents about their citizenship status.
<i>March–July</i>	2018 End-to-End Census Test in Providence County, Rhode Island.
<i>September</i>	The Commerce, Justice, Science appropriations bill, which funds the Census Bureau, was not passed. Congress and the administration agree to a short-term continuing resolution funding federal agencies, including the Census Bureau, through December 7, 2018.
<i>November</i>	Midterm elections.
<i>Dec. 22–Jan. 25</i>	Federal government shutdown.

2019

<i>January 2</i>	The U.S. Senate confirms Dr. Steven Dillingham to be the next director of the U.S. Census Bureau.
<i>January 3</i>	New Congress sworn in.
<i>February 15</i>	FY 2019 Consolidated Appropriations bill (H.R. 3055) signed into law, providing the Bureau with \$3.82 billion for all Census Bureau operations, a billion dollar increase over FY 2018, as requested by census stakeholders.
<i>March 11</i>	Administration releases FY 2020 budget proposal, which includes \$6.2 billion for the Census Bureau, of which \$5.322 billion is for the 2020 Census.
<i>May 22</i>	The House Appropriations Committee considers its version of the FY 2020 Commerce, Justice, Science appropriations bill, which includes \$8.45 billion for the Census Bureau, of which \$7.8 billion is for the 2020 Census.
<i>June 27</i>	The U.S. Supreme Court rejects the Commerce Department's attempt to add a citizenship question to the 2020 Census.
<i>August 2</i>	2-year budget agreement signed Bipartisan Budget Act of 2019
<i>Dec. 17</i>	FY20 minibus legislation (H.R. 1158) signed into law, providing the Bureau with \$7.6 billion for all Census Bureau operations and \$6.7 billion for the 2020 Census



Spending Limits and Underfunding

The decennial census is the nation's largest peacetime mobilization, counting roughly 331 million people in homes and group facilities across the country. When John Thompson became the Census Bureau director in August 2013, Congress directed him to spend no more on the 2020 Census than the bureau did for the 2010 Census (about \$13 billion), despite a growing population and increasing challenges in conducting a nationwide survey.

Normally, Congress asks the Bureau what the projected cost is to accurately count everyone in the country, as required by the U.S. Constitution. The Bureau had developed a \$17.8 billion cost estimate for the 2020 Census, based on repeating the basic 2010 Census design. However, for the first time in the modern era, Congress put a cap on census spending in advance, directing the Bureau to find cost-savings through automation and the use of administrative records. In response, Thompson led the Bureau's effort to cut \$5.2 billion from the lifecycle cost estimate by fundamentally redesigning the census to meet the cap and modernizing ways of reaching people, collecting and processing data, and managing field operations.

The 2020 Census Operational Plan marked a departure from the 2010 Census to contain costs while maintaining accuracy. Specific changes included the following:⁷

- Updating the Master Address File, in part, through the use of in-office geographic information systems and aerial imagery rather than more costly in-field canvassing.
- Use of technology for census completion and streamlining of field operations through reductions in regional census centers by half from 12 in 2010 to six in 2020, reduction in local census offices from roughly 500 to 250, and reduction of enumerators from 635,000 to 500,000.
- Self-response phase would focus on boosting response rates via the internet, a less costly way of collecting data.
- Nonresponse follow-up (NRFU) costs would be reduced by using administrative records to reduce the number of visits to non-responding households.

Even with these changes, the Bureau found that annual budgets approved by Congress were far short of what was needed to fully implement the operational plan and ensure robust testing of new methods. To make matters worse, Congress failed to pass the Fiscal Year 2017 budget on time, which temporarily froze spending at 2016 levels. Normally, in the seventh year of the decade, spending on the census begins to accelerate rapidly until the enumeration is conducted. However, in 2017 the census hit two snags: three short-term continuing resolutions (CRs) meant that the Census Bureau couldn't properly plan final

⁷ "2020 Census Operational Plan," U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau, December 2018, Version 4.0, <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/planning-docs/2020-oper-plan4.pdf>.

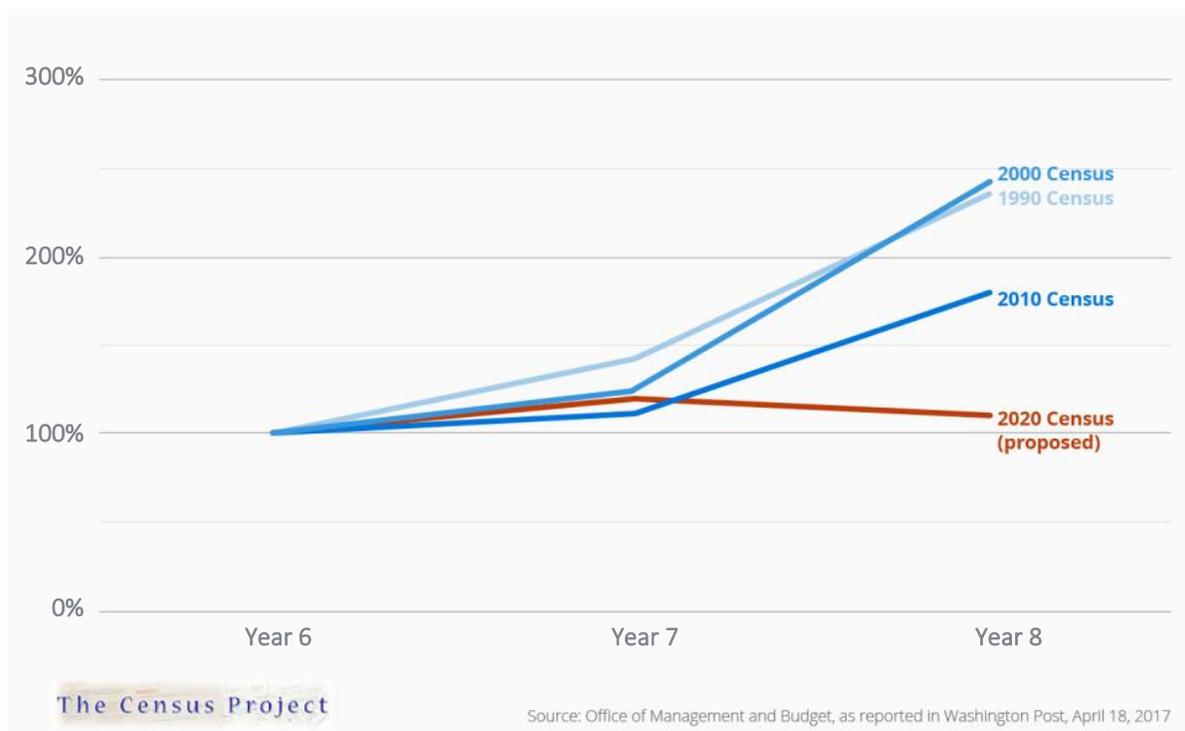
tests because it didn't know how much money it would receive for the fiscal year; and more than seven months into the fiscal year, funding was finally approved at \$164 million below the request. Compounding the problem, President Trump and Congress were on a path to funding the census in 2018 at levels well below the 2010 cycle—at least a \$300 million shortfall (see Figure 2).

The impact was immediate and significant. The Bureau began announcing changes to its testing plan. For example, it would no longer test field operations in 2017 in Puerto Rico, the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota and South Dakota, and tribal lands in Washington state.⁸ These tests provide a real-world proving ground for the planned enumeration changes, such as use of the internet.

The Bureau was forced to pare down its plans for the so-called End-to-End Census Test. The original dress rehearsal plan included three sites: Providence County, Rhode Island, which is an urban area with a diverse population; three rural counties in West Virginia; and Pierce County, Washington, which covered Tacoma and a large military base, as well as tribal lands. Unfortunately, the delayed and ultimately lower-than-requested final FY 2017 appropriation led to cancellation of all but the Providence County End-to-End Census Test site for 2018.

It was clear that the overall spending limit set by Congress, coupled with underfunding, even though the Bureau was planning within that limit, put the quality of the 2020 Census in jeopardy.

Figure 2 | 2020 Census Funding Lagging at Critical Phase: A Comparison of Four Census Funding Cycles (Year To Year Rate of Increase on Eve of National Count), The Census Project



⁸ Census Bureau, "Census Bureau Announces Changes to 2017 Field Tests," October 18, 2016, CB16-TPS.143, at <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2016/cb16-tps143.html>.

Continuing Resolutions and Government Shutdowns

FISCAL YEAR 2018—TURNING THE DOWNWARD TIDE

“There will be no second chance to get the 2020 Census right. Delayed funding cannot make up for preparation that should already be underway. We will all live with the results for a decade.”

—Vincent P. Barabba and Kenneth Prewitt, Former U.S. Census Bureau Directors⁹

A census doesn't happen all at once. While the census year itself is the most expensive, the Census Bureau has to ramp up for the big count with a decade-long cycle of research, development, and testing.¹⁰ However, appropriations for the census had been trending downward, a multi-year disaster in the making. The FY 2018 budget marked the beginning of the reversal of this trend as a result of census stakeholder advocacy.

The year 2017 was kicked off by a GAO report declaring the 2020 Census “high risk.” The GAO asserted that “the U.S. Census Bureau plans a number of innovations, including technology systems, for the 2020 Census. These innovations and other challenges jeopardize the Bureau’s ability to deliver a cost-effective census. GAO made 30 suggestions in this area since 2014, but only six have been fully implemented.”¹¹ The instability and underfunding of the Census Bureau was also making the 2020 Census high risk.

President Trump released the first full budget of his administration in May. The administration’s FY 2018 budget proposal was characterized by cuts across federal agencies and programs and increases in defense spending and resources for a border wall.¹² The budget included a \$27 million increase in the FY 2018 Census Bureau budget, a 2% increase over FY 2017 funding of \$1.47 billion. This “increase” was criticized as smoke and mirrors, noting that the administration’s proposed amount was \$140 million less than the FY 2017 administration request of \$1.64 billion.¹³ Using talking points and messaging developed by the Hill Strategy Group, advocates described it as woefully inadequate and *not a sufficient funding ramp-up* to keep 2020 Census planning and preparations on track.

⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-trump-administration-isnt-ready-for-the-2020-census/2017/08/24/1808b450-8756-11e7-961d-2f373b3977ee_story.html?utm_term=.b82849bf7f63.

¹⁰ The Census Project, “August 2017 Update,” <https://thecensusproject.org/updates/august-2017-update/>.

¹¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *High-Risk Series: Progress on Many High-Risk Areas, While Substantial Efforts Needed on Others*, Publication No. GAO-17-317 (Washington: GAO, 2017), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-317>.

¹² Kim Soffen and Dennis Lu, “What Trump cut in his agency budget,” *The Washington Post*, May 23, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-presidential-budget-2018-proposal/>.

¹³ Tara Bahrapour, “Census watchers warn of a crisis if funding for the 2020 count is not increased,” *The Washington Post*, April 18, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/census-watchers-warn-of-crisis-if-funding-for-2020-count-is-not-increased/2017/04/17/e6cc170a-20d6-11e7-a0a7-8b2a45e3dc84_story.html?utm_term=.3e5666896673&itid=lk_inline_manual_10.

The administration's first budget did not bode well for its stewardship of the 2020 Census. That same month, Census Bureau director John Thompson announced his resignation, leaving the Census Bureau without its top political leadership as Congress decides on the critical FY 2018 Census budget. Adding to stakeholder concerns was a leaked draft executive order suggesting, in part, the addition of a census question on immigration status.¹⁴

Stakeholders began sounding the alarm and pressing the administration to nominate a qualified nonpartisan professional to serve as the Bureau's director. A letter from 57 members of Congress was sent to colleagues and the administration also echoing the need to quickly fill this position¹⁵

Carrying out a strategy developed by the Hill Strategy Group, stakeholders advocated for at least \$1.85 billion for FY 2018 to help address the years of underfunding. They also asked Congress to restore funding for the census dress rehearsal in the three urban, suburban, and rural sites in 2018; build out a secure, fully tested IT system for the census; and resume development of a robust communications and partnership campaign, which had been stalled and streamlined due to insufficient funding in 2017. They emphasized that a higher funding level was needed to ensure a fair and accurate 2020 Census in *all communities* and to avoid large cost increases for the decennial census in the final years of the decade, as well as to preserve the quality of other vital datasets, such as the ACS. In an op-ed in *The Hill*, The Leadership Conference president Wade Henderson wrote, "Congress has two options: invest now in robust development of modern, cost-effective methods, or pay a lot more later for outdated operations that might not get the job done."¹⁶ Business stakeholders also echoed this messaging by saying a lack of sufficient investment in statistical programs would be "penny wise and pound foolish."

In committee discussions, appropriators were dividing along party lines in their support for increased funding. Democratic appropriators argued for the bureau to receive more money to fulfill its mission, and Republicans largely focused on cost overruns and other missteps by the agency. Census advocates worried Congress would not agree on a new appropriations bill by the start of the fiscal year in October, resulting in a continuing resolution. Another such stopgap measure could be even more damaging without a so-called anomaly for the Census Bureau, which would allow the agency more funds or flexibility to spend its temporarily flat-lined funding level more quickly.¹⁷

Sure enough, on September 8th, Congress passed and President Trump signed into law a three-month continuing resolution that included hurricane relief and a debt ceiling increase, keeping the government open through December 8, 2017. The CR also included a so-called anomaly allowing the Census Bureau flexibility to spend money at a faster rate to support time-sensitive preparations related to the 2020

¹⁴ Tara Bahrapour, "White House proposal to ask immigration status in Census could have chilling effect, experts say," *The Washington Post*, February 1, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/white-house-proposal-to-ask-immigration-status-in-census-could-have-chilling-effect-experts-say/2017/02/01/1fc51b8e-e8af-11e6-bf6f-301b6b443624_story.html?utm_term=.23969f37182e.

¹⁵ The Census Project, "Urge President Trump to quickly nominate a qualified, non-partisan U.S. Census Director," June 2017, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2017/06/censusdirdearcolleague.pdf>

¹⁶ Wade Henderson, "Penny wise, pound foolish: 2020 Census needs funding now," *The Hill*, March, 6, 2017. <https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/the-administration/322503-penny-wise-pound-foolish-2020-census-needs-funding-now>.

¹⁷ Ryan McCrimmon, "The 2020 Census is Headed for Trouble," *Congressional Quarterly Magazine*, September 5, 2017.

Census. However due to previous inadequate federal funding and funding delays, the remaining test in Providence, Rhode Island, would be cut back and not include a partnership and advertising component or a post-enumeration survey; the Group Quarters operation also was pushed back by several months and conducted entirely on paper, instead of using automated data collection tools as initially planned.

In November, the administration revised its FY 2018 request to provide an additional \$187 million for Census 2020 preparations. In response, a coalition of over 100 stakeholders,¹⁸ organized by The Census Project, called on Congress to support the administration's request and continued to advocate for additional funding for delayed testing, advertising, outreach, partnership, and promotion activities. In a November 16 letter they wrote the following:

*"The new request does not include sufficient funding for historic numbers of partnership specialists, who help state and local officials and trusted community leaders support census operations through focused outreach and promotion to their constituencies. These operations help reduce costs by boosting self-response and increase accuracy by targeting messages to historically hard-to-count communities. We strongly urge additional funding for these important activities in the final Omnibus funding measure for Fiscal 2018 . . . The FY 2018 appropriations process is a just-in-time opportunity to remedy these oversights and get our Constitutionally-mandated 2020 census back on track."*¹⁹

To help bolster the Hill Strategy Group's strategy, other stakeholders from across the ideological and political spectrum were recruited in support of full funding for the census. For example, the American Enterprise Institute and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities submitted a joint letter on the importance of census data.²⁰ An editorial in the *Washington Examiner* urged Republicans to comply with Secretary Wilbur Ross' funding request stating the following:

*"It will not pay for Republicans to be cheap. A faulty census will lead to a dubious reapportionment of congressional districts among states, and an even more dubious redistricting. Our democracy can't afford a further erosion of trust. A botched Census under a Republican president would buttress suspicion that Republicans can win elections but can't govern competently."*²¹

Advocates were also on the lookout for harmful amendments that may be introduced throughout the process, such as to require a citizenship question. They urged lawmakers to *oppose* any amendments that would shift funds from the Census Bureau to other agencies; undermine a high-quality ACS; and add untested questions to the 2020 Census or ACS.

¹⁸ Coalition included state and local governments, business and industry, civil rights and labor groups, housing and child advocates, and research and professional organizations that support a complete, fair and accurate census.

¹⁹ The Census Project, November 16, 2017, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/cjs-approps-18-letter-final-v3.pdf>.

²⁰ Arloc Sherman, "Don't underfund the Census, AEI and CBPP researchers agree," The Census Project, October 9, 2017, <https://thecensusproject.org/2017/10/09/dont-underfund-the-census-aei-and-cbpp-researchers-agree/>.

²¹ *Washington Examiner*, October 12, 2017. *The Washington Examiner*, October 12, 2017, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/a-few-cents-a-lot-of-sense-and-the-census>.

With Congress and the administration at a stalemate, two more CRs were passed. The third four-week CR was signed on December 21. Carrying out the strategy of the Hill Strategy Group, advocates pushed for a funding anomaly in the CR to “provide the agency with funding above the President’s request, on an annualized basis, to restore comprehensive, rigorous 2020 Census preparations and to meet its obligation to conduct the next decennial census as required by the U.S. Constitution.” The CR was passed with an anomaly that allowed the agency to spend at a faster rate to keep 2020 Census preparations on schedule.

The federal budget discussions would stall again over funding disagreements for the U.S.-Mexico border wall and extension of status of persons affected by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The December 21 CR ended in a three-day government shutdown.

Throughout the delays, census stakeholders pushed the Hill Strategy Group’s agenda and continued to advocate for more funding for the 2020 Census in congressional meetings and testimonies and countless sign-on letters. On February 9, 2018, Congress adopted a two-year bipartisan budget agreement that raised the overall cap for non-defense program spending, giving stakeholders an opportunity to advocate for increased funding for the census. In a letter to appropriators they wrote the following:

“We further urge you to make investment in the best possible Census for 2020 when allocating additional funding by increasing the 302(b) allocations for the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) bill at the highest possible level to accommodate the traditional and necessary increase in Census Bureau funding at this point in the Decennial planning cycle . . . Increasing the 302(b) allocation is the critical first step to securing even the minimum funding level necessary for the professionals at the Census Bureau to fully implement the long-planned operations to launch 2020 activities that will soon begin. We respect that there are many demands and difficult tradeoffs in your deliberations over 302(b) allocations; however, we submit that only one of these is a Constitutionally mandated task that has one opportunity for success.”²²

After a total of five continuing resolutions and six months into FY 2018, the final omnibus budget agreement for FY 2018, H.R. 1625, was signed into law. The budget provided the Bureau with \$2.81 billion—\$1.3 billion more than the agency’s FY 2017 funding level and a reversal of the downward trend of underfunding of the 2020 Census. *The Washington Post* reported that the news left census watchers flabbergasted.

“When I found out about it yesterday I almost fell out of my chair,” said John Thompson, who resigned in May as director of the Bureau amid controversy over funding. “One thing that it sure says is that they recognize that the Census is important, on both sides of the aisle.”²³

²² The Census Project, February 22, 2018, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/final-302b-letter-for-fy2018-2-22.pdf>.

²³ Rara Bahrapour, “The 2020 Census received much more funding in the House spending bill than advocates had anticipated,” *The Washington Post*, March 22, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/the-2020-census-received-much-more-funding-in-the-fiscal-2018-budget-than-advocates-had-anticipated/2018/03/22/8e9597ce-2df9-11e8-8688-e053ba58f1e4_story.html.

The report language accompanying the bill directed the Bureau to “ensure that its FY 2018 partnership and communication activities in support of the 2020 Census are conducted at a level of effort and staffing no less than that conducted during fiscal year 2008 in preparation for the 2010 Decennial Census.” In addition, the report notes that since “70 percent of the costs of the 2020 Census will be incurred in fiscal year 2019 and fiscal year 2020,” the Bureau is given flexibility to spend half of the amount needed for the 2020 Census in those fiscal years, a valuable provision that would be used in the next appropriations cycle that allowed the Census Bureau to spend more during the subsequent year’s CR while most other federal agencies were held at FY 2018 total spending levels.

The FY 2018 budget provided the Bureau with the minimum resources needed to prepare for the census, with funding for vital communications, partnership, and field activities above the administration’s request.²⁴ In response to the new budget numbers, The Census Project said, “The dismal trend of many years of underfunding 2020 Census preparations has finally been reversed with bipartisan support in Congress. Our assessment is the Bureau now has the minimum resources needed to prepare for its Constitutional mandate. However, the FY 2019 funding level will be critical, and supporters of a full, fair, and accurate count will remain vigilant.”²⁵

FISCAL YEAR 2019—LAST CHANCE



“The FY 2019 budget will be really critical for the Census Bureau. They have been deferring and deferring things. But nothing can be deferred in 2019. There’s simply no more time to lose.”

—John Thompson²⁶

In 2018, Congress was preoccupied with midterm elections, the implications of the citizenship question, and funding deliberations throughout that summer.²⁷ Government shutdowns bookended 2018 and set the tone for what would be another challenging year that would require advocacy on multiple fronts because of the administration’s decision to add an untested citizenship question to the 2020 Census. The question added further instability to census planning and raised concerns about decreased participation of immigrant and other historically undercounted communities. The addition of the citizenship question also had fiscal implications and required the Bureau to plan on two tracks: one with and one without the question. It also required resources for additional communications and messaging to address the mistrust and fear about the question and its use.

²⁴ Terri Ann Lowenthal, "Census Policy Update," Funders' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP), February 13, 2018 <https://funderscommittee.org/resource/census-policy-update-whats-in-store-for-2018/>.

²⁵ The Census Project, "Census Budget," March 27, 2018, <https://thecensusproject.org/2018/03/>.

²⁶ <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/07/money-politics-and-abandoned-homes-why-2020-census-might-be-jeopardy>.

²⁷ The Census Project, "May 2018 Census Project Update," <https://thecensusproject.org/may-2018-census-project-update/>.

Even while FY 2018 budget negotiations were being finalized at the start of the calendar year, the administration released its FY 2019 budget on February 12 requesting \$3.8 billion for the Census Bureau. The proposed funding level was well below the \$4.735 billion that census advocates believed necessary to support the Census Bureau as well as funding for specific activities. The Hill Strategy Group kicked into high gear and developed a summary of census advocates' funding recommendations that included the following:²⁸

- **Expand targeted communications activities (+\$100 million)**—Additional targeted advertising and promotion—the heart of the communications campaign—is necessary to help boost response in the wake of the threats outlined previously and deep anxiety about a new, untested citizenship question.
- **Increase number of partnership staff from 1,000 to 2,000 (+\$62.5 million)**—Partnership specialists and assistants will engage, educate, and mobilize states, localities, and community-based organizations in support of the census. These "trusted messengers" are especially critical in engaging hard-to-reach population groups.
- **Expand the Bureau's "field footprint" through more local offices and/or questionnaire assistance centers (QACs) (+\$312 million)**—More offices will help the Bureau respond effectively and in real time to unanticipated counting challenges—including technology failures, recruitment difficulties, and low self-response—and increase its *on-the-ground presence* in areas that we know will be harder to count.
- **Fully fund Commerce secretary's proposed contingency fund (\$314 million, or 10% of appropriation)**—A contingency fund is prudent to help the Bureau prepare for unanticipated costs associated with possible IT failures, cyber security threats, last-minute design changes based on the evaluation of the 2018 End-to-End Census Test (the "dress rehearsal"), and the modified, more expensive methods needed to count areas devastated by natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, wildfires, tornadoes).
- **Provide the Census Bureau sufficient flexibility**—Provide flexibility to spend more of its FY 2019 appropriation in that fiscal year and to approve requests for additional spending on vital activities based on identification of real-time risks and emerging threats to a successful census.

The spring of 2018 focused on a coordinated push (organized by the Hill Strategy Group) to increase the Census Bureau's budget by almost \$1 billion more than the administration's request for these needed activities. The message was delivered through in-person advocacy and letters to the CJS subcommittee from congressional champions in Dear Colleague letters,²⁹ census stakeholders, and business stakeholders. Civil rights organizations and a broad coalition of 150 census stakeholders made the case

²⁸ Census Stakeholder Recommendation Summary, June 1, 2018, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/fy2019-ask-summary-june-2018.pdf>.

²⁹ Dear Colleague Letter, April 11, 2018, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/fy19censusappropriationsletterfinal.pdf>.

for the census as a cornerstone of democracy and its role in the allocation of federal resources. They also emphasized the importance of FY 2019 as a “critical year,” advocating for the specific operational and programmatic needs of the Census Bureau to ensure the participation of historically undercounted populations.³⁰ Business leaders made the economic and business case:

“Failure to appropriate robust funds would lead to inaccuracies that will have a significant, long-lasting impact on businesses who depend on this trusted official data to make material decisions each day. Manufacturers, retailers, and financial analysts use the data to measure a company’s health, compensate employees, quantify ROI, identify new opportunities, forecast performance, and optimize consumer price and strategies. Without accurate Census data on the U.S. population, our economy would suffer.”³¹

The House Appropriations Committee responded by approving H.R. 5952, with almost \$4.8 billion for the Bureau on May 17. The bill’s accompanying report language clarified that some of the increased funding can be spent in the first quarter of FY 2020, which would guard against insufficient funding if federal agencies were again covered by a temporary continuing resolution at the start of the fiscal year, which coincided with final preparations before the launch of peak 2020 Census operations. Further, the report urged the Census Bureau to engage in “increased outreach activities to historically undercounted communities, including colonias.”³²

Congress passed 5 of the 12 appropriations bills over the summer, however, the FY 2019 CJS appropriations bill, which funds the Census Bureau, was not one of them. In September, Congress passed a short-term CR funding federal agencies through December 7.

Carrying out a strategy developed by the Hill Strategy Group, advocates continued to reach out to key congressional leadership officials and appropriators. They also sought to make the census an issue with legislators who are leaders on tribal issues. This included outreach to members of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, including Chairman John Hoeven, Sen. Jerry Moran, and Sen. Lisa Murkowski. Advocates also reached out to rural Republicans, particularly appropriators, from Florida, Tennessee, Texas, Kentucky, and Missouri. They used a George Washington University study showing the impact of census data on federally directed assistance to rural areas.³³

The CJS bill was taken up in November after the midterm elections in a lame duck session. Advocates encouraged appropriators to provide \$4.456 billion to the Census Bureau, a request that was echoed by

³⁰ The Census Project, May 1, 2018, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/final-fy19-census-project-sign-on-letter-5-1-18.pdf>.

³¹ Insight Association, “Business groups in support of FY2019 Census funding,” May 15, 2018, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/final-census-biz-groups-fy19.pdf>.

³² H.R. 115-704 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/115th-congress/house-report/704/1>.

³³ George Washington Institute of Public Policy, “Census-guided financial assistance to rural America” <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/gwururalamericasept2018.pdf>.

Senate champions in A Dear Colleague letter.³⁴ A second CR was passed funding the government through December 21. Negotiations then stalled over disputes once again for funding of a U.S.-Mexico border wall, leading to a government shutdown that would last for 35 days.

The Census Bureau ceased most operations during the shutdown except planning for the 2020 Census. However, the Bureau had additional resources to draw from while the final FY 2019 CJS bill was being negotiated because of the approximately \$1 billion in carryover funds that the FY 2018 omnibus appropriations measure provided.

Throughout the budget negotiations and shutdown, advocates raised the alarm to the Office of Management and Budget³⁵ and Congress³⁶ about the critical juncture of Census 2020 preparations and the need for uninterrupted and adequate funding. After the shutdown, The Census Project, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, NALEO, and AAJC sent a letter to Congress once again urging adequate, timely investment in 2020 Census preparations as the final spending bills for FY 2019 were negotiated and warning against the effects of another shutdown.³⁷

On February 15, 2019, Congress and the administration reached a budget agreement (HR 3055). The FY 2019 budget included \$3.82 billion in new funding for all Census Bureau operations, a billion dollar increase over FY 2018. Combined with a roughly \$1 billion carryover from FY 2018, the FY 2019 funding level met the stakeholder recommendation for the Bureau and 2020 Census operations in particular. Equally important, Congress directed the Census Bureau in the accompanying report to the bill to “devote funding to expand targeted communications activities as well as to open local Questionnaire Assistance Centers in hard-to-count communities,” as stakeholders had recommended.³⁸

FISCAL YEAR 2020—FULL FUNDING

The new year (2019) ushered in a new Congress and new Democratic leadership in the House. The Hill Strategy Group recalibrated its strategy and tactics to take into account the new political landscape, and The Leadership Conference and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities’ deep relationships with Speaker Pelosi’s office was to become increasingly critical. Once again, the Hill Strategy Group developed talking points that formed the basis of the messaging around census appropriations issues for FY 2020. Using these messages, census advocates spent the month of February educating newly elected members about the 2020 Census and organizing Hill Days. The Census Project and coalition members participated

³⁴ Dear Colleague Letter. December 11, 2018, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2018/12/final-letter-to-senate-approps-re-final-fy19-census-funding-12-11-18.pdf>.

³⁵ The Census Project, “Letter to Mick Mulvaney,” October 30, 2018, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/census-project-co-director-letter-to-mulvaney-10-30-18.pdf>.

³⁶ The Census Project, “Letter to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees,” November 28, 2018, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2018/12/cplettertohouseandsenaterefy2019census11-28-18.pdf>.

³⁷ The Leadership and The Census Project, “Letter to Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer,” February 4, 2019, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2019/02/fy2019-shutdown-census-implications-final-2-4-19-1.pdf>.

³⁸ The Census Project, “Census Bureau gets \$1 billion increase in final FY 2019 funding law,” February 15, 2019, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2019/02/census-final-fy10-funding-press-release-2-15-19.pdf>.

in over 20 meetings with freshmen House offices, informing staff about a wide range of census-related funding and policy issues and preparing them for the Census Bureau's needs in FY 2020. At the invitation of the House Census Caucus, The Census Project sponsored Census 101 briefings to inform new and returning congressional staff members about key census funding, policy, and planning issues facing the 116th Congress.³⁹

A new Census Bureau director, Steven Dillingham, had been confirmed. Census advocates and stakeholders met with him and his senior staff in February to establish a relationship and seek his assurance that he will put the interests of the Census Bureau ahead of political or partisan interests.

On March 11, the Trump administration released its FY 2020 budget request, which included \$6.2 billion in direct new funding for the Census Bureau, of which \$5.322 billion was for the 2020 Census. The administration proposed to supplement that funding by carrying over \$1 billion made available in FY 2019. However, in the report accompanying the FY 2019 Consolidated Appropriations Act, Congress instructed the Census Bureau to spend this funding in FY 2019 on priority activities that "maximize self-response to the 2020 Census."⁴⁰

Census stakeholders described the administration's request as shockingly low and urged Congress to appropriate \$8.45 billion for the Census Bureau, including at least \$7.581 billion in direct funding for the 2020 Census operations in FY 2020. In their advocacy and letters to appropriators, they noted that "the request is insufficient in large part because it assumes a \$1 billion carryover from FY 2020 of needed FY 2019 funds. As a result, the administration is requesting only \$6.2 billion in direct new funding for the Census Bureau." They reminded appropriators that Congress did not include a provision that allowed the Census Bureau to hold funds available in FY 2019 in reserve for FY 2020.⁴¹

Census advocates also identified several variables that posed increased risk to and resources for the census: the inclusion of the citizenship question; the 2020 presidential campaign and election, which will overlap with peak census operations; and a tight labor market, which would make it hard for the Bureau to recruit, hire, and retain qualified staff. They emphasized that the administration's request, "obscures and fails to meet the Census Bureau's true funding needs . . . and doesn't reflect two historical census funding trends: (1) about half of the census lifecycle costs is spent in the census year; and (2) census year funding for the decennial census is at least twice the funding level of the prior fiscal year."⁴²

The \$8.45 billion census stakeholder funding recommendation was in keeping with funding increases the Census Bureau received between FY 2009 and FY 2010 (\$4.2 billion increase for a total of \$7.6 billion in FY 2010) to support peak 2010 Census operations. The Census Project circulated sign-on letters and a Dear

³⁹ The Census Project, "Census Project and House Census Caucus Cosponsor "Census 101" Briefing for New and Returning Staff," February 8, 2019, <https://thecensusproject.org/2019/02/08/census-project-and-house-census-caucus-cosponsor-census-101-briefing-for-new-and-returning-staff/>.

⁴⁰ The Census Project, "March 2019 Census Project Update," <https://thecensusproject.org/march-2019-census-project-update/>.

⁴¹ The Census Project, "Letter to House and Senate Appropriations Committees," April 16, 2019, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2019/04/fy-2020-census-project-sign-on-letter-pre-cjs-mark-up-4-16-19-2.pdf>.

⁴² Ibid.

Colleague letter led by Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI) to inform Congress of the stakeholders' funding recommendation and rationale. The letters coincided with the consideration of the FY 2020 Commerce, Justice Science appropriation bill in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate.

Meanwhile, the litigation against the inclusion of a citizenship question was winding its way to the Supreme Court, and the debate over the question was also intersecting with appropriations deliberations in Congress. Senator Schatz led another Dear Colleague letter of 32 senators, urging the Senate Appropriations Committee to include language in the FY 2020 CJS appropriations legislation to prohibit funds for "any question that was not included in the 2018 End-to-End Census Test in Providence, Rhode Island." They wrote, "It is imperative that the questions to be included in the upcoming decennial census are limited to the questions that have been adequately tested and evaluated."⁴³

Rather than take a defensive posture, advocates' approach to the citizenship question was to focus lawmakers' attention on the scientific integrity of the census and the waste of taxpayer dollars of conducting a census with an untested question. While the question had been used in the ACS, advocates argued that failure to test the question in the context of a completely redesigned census and the current environment of fear in many communities represents unsound business and scientific practice of the highest order.

In April, The Leadership Conference, The Census Project, NALEO, and AAJC sent a letter to appropriators. The letter, entitled "*Don't Short Change the 2020 Census: The Census Bureau Must Spend Available Resources Now*," warned about the harmful impact of the administration's attempt to carry over \$1 billion in resources to FY 2020.⁴⁴ They urged Congress to provide increased funding and also to exercise their oversight to require immediate and robust Census Bureau action to achieve the following goals:

- Increase the number of Partnership Program staff and the pace of hiring and onboarding.
- Expand targeted communications, including the availability of culturally and linguistically appropriate advertising and promotional materials, to boost participation among historically hard-to-count communities and population groups.
- Expand Questionnaire Assistance Centers in hard-to-count communities.
- Establish a contingency fund to cover costs associated with unexpected challenges during the census year, such as natural disasters.

Census stakeholders had been advocating to the Census Bureau for a QAC program to increase the on-the-ground 2020 Census presence in communities. With the reduced 2020 Census field infrastructure, QACs were an important means to reach historically undercounted communities. In March, ninety

⁴³ Dear Colleague Letter, April 9, 2019, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2019/04/final-letter-to-cjs-re.-fy20-bill-language-on-2020-census-4-9-19.pdf>.

⁴⁴ The Leadership Conference and The Census Project Letter, "Don't short change the 2020 Census: The Census Bureau must spend available resources now," April 29, 2019, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2019/04/census-project-and-lcchr-letter-to-house-re.-fy-19-spending-4-30.pdf>.

stakeholder organizations sent a joint letter to the Census Bureau encouraging the Bureau “to promptly consult with stakeholders in developing a plan” for QACs for the 2020 Census and provided initial recommendations.⁴⁵ Advocates also encouraged Congress to exercise greater oversight to ensure the QAC program was implemented.

The House Commerce Justice and Science funding bill, passed in June, providing the Census Bureau with \$8.45 billion in FY 2020, which included \$7.5 billion for the 2020 Census, mirroring advocates’ recommendation. The bill included a provision precluding the Bureau from using funds to add any questions to the 2020 Census that were not included in the 2018 End-to-End Census Test. In the report accompanying the bill, the committee called the administration’s assumption that approximately \$1 billion of FY 2019 funding being used to offset FY 2020 costs disingenuous.⁴⁶ The committee directed the Bureau to spend at least half (\$500 million) of the \$1 billion in carryover funds in FY 2019. The report also included language directing the Bureau to prioritize a strong engagement strategy with partners and trusted voices in the community, take steps to develop the Mobile Response Initiative (MRI), increase the number of temporary census offices and partnership staff, and concentrate its efforts in hard-to-count communities and work with state, local, and tribal partners to identify locations for the MRI to target. An additional \$100 million was allocated to support these efforts.⁴⁷

The MRI was the Bureau’s counter proposal to the Appropriations Committee’s directive in the FY 2019 bill report to establish QACs. Renamed the “Mobile Questionnaire Assistance” (MQA) program, it would incorporate the use of technology and provide readily accessible ways for people to respond to the census.⁴⁸ Stakeholders viewed the MRI plan as a good starting point but not sufficient in staffing levels and footprint to meet the broad need for internet self-response access and assistance at trusted host locations in hard-to-count communities. The American Library Association, a national census partner, and The Leadership Conference led the advocacy to work with House and Senate CJS allies to obtain more detail on the MRI plan and urge the Bureau to expand the effort to include fixed location QACs and more staff.

In late June, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected the Commerce Department’s attempt to add a citizenship question to the 2020 Census. In a 5-4 decision led by Chief Justice John Roberts, in the case of *U.S. Department of Commerce v. State of New York*, the court ruled against the addition, rejecting the department’s rationale that the question is necessary to enforce the Voting Rights Act.

A two-year budget agreement was reached in August between Congress and the administration, warding off automatic spending cuts, suspending the budget ceiling through July 2020, and revising the

⁴⁵ Letter to Director Steve Dillingham, March 19, 2019, <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/govinfo/Sign-ons/Questionnaire%20Assistance%20Center%20recommendations%20031919%20%281%29.pdf>.

⁴⁶ <https://appropriations.house.gov/sites/democrats.appropriations.house.gov/files/FY2020%20CJS%20Report%20Draft.pdf>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ The U.S. Census Bureau, “2020 Census: Mobile Questionnaire Assistance Program, Project Plan, Version 2.0” October 26, 2020. <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/2020-census-mobile-questionnaire-assistance-operation.pdf>.

discretionary spending caps in FY 2020 and 2021.⁴⁹ As part of the agreement and as census advocates' encouraged, the 2020 Census received a unique "cap adjustment," providing it with \$2.5 billion outside the caps.⁵⁰ This was a significant achievement for advocates because the spending cap would influence their ability to advocate for further increases in census funding.

With the summer recess ending, the appropriations process had now shifted to the Senate. The Census Project and its coalition of over 150 organizations sent the leaders of the Senate Appropriations Committee and Senate Commerce, Science, Justice Appropriations Subcommittee a letter urging them to provide the Census Bureau with \$8.4 billion in FY 2020, in keeping with the House funding bill. They also urged the enactment of a final bill by the start of the fiscal year or, if necessary, a full-year funding anomaly. They warned of the deleterious impact of insufficient, delayed, or uncertain full-year funding on the implementation of the 2020 Census.⁵¹

Business stakeholders were particularly important voices in reaching Republican members. A group of 74 business leaders also echoed this same message in a letter and urged Senate appropriators to provide \$8.45 billion for FY 2020 with at least \$7.5 billion for 2020 Census operations. They warned, "An unreliable 2020 Census would have harmful effects on businesses and the American economy that would persist into the future."⁵²

The outreach to Republicans focused on two key issues: (1) funding levels and (2) the business case for a fair and accurate census. On the funding levels, advocates' message was that funding the 2020 Census at FY 2010 levels, adjusted for inflation, matched stakeholders' funding request for FY 2020 of \$8 billion (see Figure 3: Census Bureau Funding).

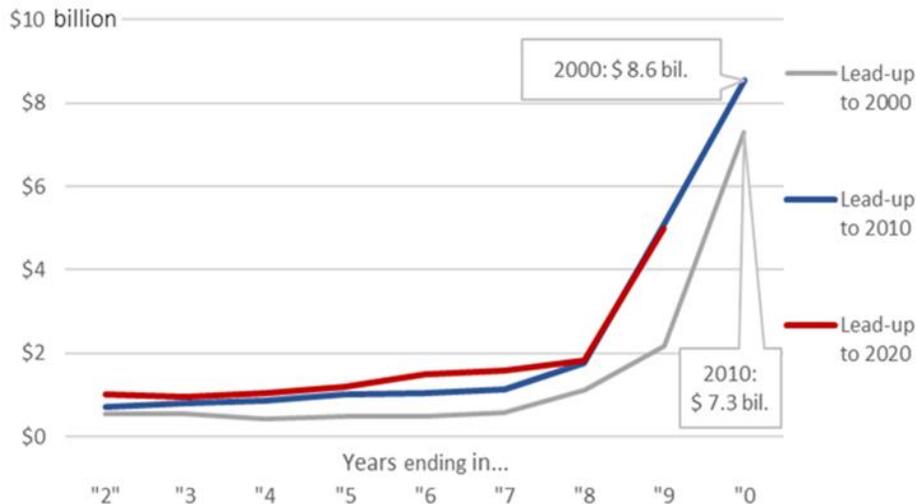
⁴⁹ Caitlin Emma, "Trump signs 2-year budget deal," Politico, August 2, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/08/02/trump-signs-budget-deal-1444908>.

⁵⁰ The Census Project, "July 2019 Census Project Update," <https://thecensusproject.org/july-2019-census-project-update/>.

⁵¹ The Census Project, "Letter to House and Senate Appropriations," July 24, 2019, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/senatecjssignonletterfinal-7-24-19-2-1.pdf>.

⁵² Business for the 2020 Census, "Letter to House and Senate Appropriations Committees," June 18, 2019, <https://strongnation.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/654/525611bc-0e4c-4bcf-82f5-5fc8ebf26735.pdf?1562592467&inline;20filename=%22FY20%20Census%20Approps%20Business%20Sign-on%20Letter.pdf%22>.

Figure 3 | Census Bureau Funding in billions of 2020 inflation-adjusted dollars, The Census Project



Notes: \$1.056 billion carried over from 2018 to 2019 is shown in 2019, not 2018.
 All figures in fiscal year 2020 CPI-U dollars.
 Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

By September, the Senate Appropriations Committee had cleared 10 of 12 appropriations bills, but none had made it to the Senate floor for a vote. With the end of the fiscal year looming, Congress passed and the president signed a seven-week continuing resolution to fund the federal government through November 21, 2019. An anomaly was included in the CR that gave the Census Bureau authority to spend funding at a faster rate in order to keep Census 2020 operations on track.⁵³

Census stakeholders and congressional champions had advocated that the funding anomaly in the continuing resolution include a direct full-year appropriation of \$8.175 billion as a minimum funding level, with the \$7.5 billion in direct funding for 2020 Census operations. In a September 18 Dear Colleague letter, once again led by Sen. Brian Schatz, 25 senators argued that an upfront full-year appropriation was necessary to protect the 2020 Census from funding constraints triggered by potential government shutdown concerns and the need to provide spending flexibility to address emerging challenges.⁵⁴

An open letter to both House and Senate appropriations committees from seven former Census Bureau directors emphasized FY 2020 as a pivotal point in the decennial census process and advocated for a full-year appropriation, regardless of the funding vehicle, to avoid disruptions in the launch and implementation of the 2020 Census. They wrote, “We believe that the Census Bureau stands the best chance of conducting a census that counts all states, localities, communities, and population groups at

⁵³ The Census Project, “September 2019 Census Project Update,” <https://thecensusproject.org/september-2019-census-project-update/>.

⁵⁴ Dear Colleague Letter, September 18, 2019, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2019/09/final-letter-to-senate-approps-re.-fy20-funding-anomaly-for-census-bureau-9.18.2019.pdf>.

equal levels of accuracy and coverage, if the director and senior officials know the resources available for final preparations and the entire enumeration process as soon as possible.”⁵⁵

This was followed by an October 24th letter from The Census Project and a coalition of 700 national, state, and local organizations urging Congress to provide “full-year funding for the 2020 Census as soon as possible, whether as part of a package of final spending bills, or in a new continuing resolution.” The letter went on to say:

*The Census Bureau must have the **certainty of full funding for the decennial census now**, so that it can commit sufficient resources for final preparations, major operations, and expanded activities targeting hard-to-count communities, without concern that its funding may fall short of need. **Therefore, in the event a second CR is necessary, we urge Congress to include a full year appropriation of no less than the Senate committee-reported amount of \$6.7 billion for the 2020 Census. Preferably, the Senate will soon consider and pass a full year FY 2020 Appropriation for the Department of Commerce which will provide the Census Bureau with all it needs.***

*Absent the certainty of funding, the Bureau might have to curtail important decennial census activities, like outreach, advertising, cybersecurity measures, or staff hiring.*⁵⁶

On October 31, the Senate approved the FY 2020 CJS appropriations bill along with a package of appropriations bills. The funding legislation provided \$7.6 billion for the Census Bureau, including \$6.7 billion for the 2020 Census. However, the House and Senate still needed to reconcile the funding levels, and the CR would expire November 21. Advocates praised the Senate for the funding of the Census Bureau and also advocated that Congress quickly negotiate a final appropriations bill for the president to sign or include full funding for the Census Bureau in a new continuing resolution.⁵⁷

A second continuing resolution was signed into law on November 21, keeping the government open through December 20th. The CR allowed the Census Bureau to spend money at a faster rate through its duration, and it also gave the Census Bureau an explicit temporary spending rate of \$7.3 billion for the Periodic Censuses and Programs account, which included a spending rate of at least 6.7 billion for the 2020 Census. It also allowed the Bureau to spend at least \$90 million to implement a Mobile Questionnaire Assistance Center program.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ “An Open Letter to the Bipartisan Leadership of Congress and Congressional Appropriations Committees, from former U.S. Census Bureau Directors” October 22, 2019, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/fy2020-census-bureau-funding-former-directors-ltr-to-congress-10-22-19.pdf>.

⁵⁶ The Census Project, “Letter to House and Senate Appropriations Committee,” October 24, 2019, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/census-project-fy2020-final-bill-and-cr-anomaly-letter-october-2019.pdf>.

⁵⁷ The Census Project, “Census Project Commends Senate Approval of 2020 Census Funding – Full Year Appropriation Needed ASAP,” October 31, 2019, <https://censusproject.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/census-project-commends-senate-approval-press-release-10-31-19.pdf>.

⁵⁸ The Census Project, “November 2019 Census Project Update,” <https://thecensusproject.org/november-2019-census-project-update/>.

While this specific spending rate was a helpful modification to the CR, stakeholders continued to urge congressional leaders to include a direct full-year appropriation. On December 6, The Census Project circulated a sign-on letter with more than 200 organizations and companies to Congress pressing lawmakers to provide no less than \$6.7 billion for the 2020 Census (the Senate funding bill level) whether as part of a package of final spending bills or in a new and third CR—whichever vehicle will be enacted first in the coming weeks. The letters stated⁵⁹

*“An accurate count is jeopardized without **sufficient, on-time resources**. The Census Bureau needs the **certainty of full-year funding for the 2020 Census now**, so that it can commit necessary resources for final preparations, major operations, and expanded activities targeting hard-to-count communities in rural, suburban and urban areas, without concern that its funding may fall short of need.”*

On December 20, the president signed two “minibus” spending bills into law, averting another government shutdown. The 12 spending bills for FY 2020 that started October 1 were bundled into two separate packages, one carrying security-related measures and another containing domestic programs and foreign aid as well as a collection of tax breaks, health care legislation, and more.⁶⁰ The spending bills provided the Census Bureau with a \$7.6 billion budget for FY 2020, including full funding of \$6.7 billion for the 2020 Census, the same as passed by the Senate Appropriations Committee, and \$1.4 billion more than the administration request. This was double the funding level that the agency received in FY 2019 and comes in addition to more than a billion dollars in funds carried over from FY 2018, giving the Bureau all the resources needed to fully fund major 2020 operations, as well as a contingency fund.⁶¹

The report accompanying H.R. 1158 specified that it “supports no less than the level of effort for outreach and communications that was utilized in preparation for the 2020 Decennial Census, adjusted for inflation.” According to The Census Project co-director Mary Jo Hoeksema, “the appropriators set the right tone, but it is up to Congressional oversight to ensure that the Census Bureau delivers a robust outreach and communications campaign.”⁶²

Conclusion

While this case ends with FY 2020, the advocacy for census funding continued and became more complicated and important as the nation grappled with an historic global pandemic during the census year. The pandemic created an upheaval in the 2020 Census, shifting timelines and outreach plans. The same census stakeholders that successfully advocated for census funding continued to advocate to ensure that in spite of a pandemic, the census had the resources it needed and the operations in place to implement a full and accurate count.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Jennifer Shutt, “Trump signs spending bill, averts shutdown,” December 20, 2019, <https://www.rollcall.com/2019/12/20/trump-signs-spending-bills-averts-shutdown/>.

⁶¹ The Census Project, “December 2019 Census Project Update,” <https://thecensusproject.org/december-2019-census-project-update/>.

⁶² Ibid.



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