



AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO

John Gage
National President

J. David Cox, Sr.
National Secretary-Treasurer

Andrea E. Brooks
National Vice President for
Women and Fair Practices

April 24, 2008

Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairwoman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, and Science
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski:

On behalf of the thousands of federal employees who work at the U.S. Census Bureau, I strongly urge you to support the planned major redesign of the 2010 Decennial Census by appropriating:

- (1) an additional \$230 million in FY 2008 funding when you and your colleagues consider the FY 2008 supplemental appropriations bill, and
- (2) an additional \$700 million above the President's FY 2009 budget request when you and your colleagues consider the FY 2009 Commerce, Justice, and Science appropriations bill.

As you know, the Census Bureau recently announced that the agency plans to drop the use of handheld computers (HHCs) during the nonresponse follow-up phase of the 2010 Decennial Census, and revert back to a paper-based nonresponse follow-up operation. Commerce Department Secretary Carlos Guitierrez recently informed Congress that the Census Bureau will need an additional \$230 million in FY 2008 funding and an additional \$700 million in FY 2009 funding to ramp up new operational systems to accommodate the paper-based canvass, including new forms, instructions and training materials, and additional personnel to service help desks and data centers.

The primary reason for this planned redesign of the 2010 Decennial Census, according to the April 15 testimony of Census Bureau Director Steve Murdock before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, are the problems with the HHCs that Census Bureau personnel experienced during last year's dress rehearsal operation:

- The HHCs often took far longer than expected to move between screens, and they often froze up.
- There were difficulties in obtaining transmission to and from the HHCs.
- The HHCs could not handle assignment areas that contained more than 700 addresses, and it is believed this flaw cannot be corrected.

After reviewing the many reports on these HHC problems produced by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and Commerce Department's Inspector General (IG), it is apparent these HHC problems have occurred because of the

failure of Census Bureau's top management to competently manage the agency's contract with the Harris Corporation to develop the HHCs. The GAO and IG reports detail how the Census Bureau management failed: (1) to define specific measurable performance requirements for the HHCs, (2) to develop a comprehensive plan to control costs and manage operations, and (3) to maintain diligent oversight of its contractor, the Harris Corporation.

While AFGE supports additional funding in the FY 2008 supplemental appropriations bill and the FY 2009 CJS appropriations bill for the planned redesign of the 2010 Decennial Census, we oppose the Bush Administration's insistence on cutting other Commerce Department programs to come up with new funding for the 2010 Decennial Census. Most of the targeted cuts are from programs the Administration tried to kill or reduce last year – such as spending for economic development assistance programs that provide stimulus to the flagging economy, as well as spending for congressionally-favored programs like the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). As an April 10 *New York Times* editorial, "Another Heck of a Job," contended:

"It is petty for the White House to use the census as a way to challenge the outcome of a lost budget battle. It is unconscionable to hold the census hostage to such demands when administration officials are the ones responsible for the Census Bureau's dysfunction."

In conclusion, I urge you to support the planned major redesign of the 2010 Decennial Census by supporting: (1) an additional \$230 million in FY 2008 funding when the Senate considers the FY 2008 supplemental appropriations bill, and (2) an additional \$700 million above the President's FY 2009 budget request when the Senate considers the FY 2009 CJS appropriations bill.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Beth Moten
Legislative and Political Director