



November 9, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Vice Chairwoman  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Vice Chairwoman Mikulski:

On behalf Population Association of America (PAA) and Association of Population Centers (APC), we are writing to express support for funding federal agencies that directly and indirectly support the population sciences in fiscal year (FY) 2016.

PAA is the premiere professional, scientific society for more than 3,000 behavioral and social scientists—including demographers, sociologists, economists, epidemiologists and statisticians—who study the implications of population change. Our members conduct research and train young scientists at U.S. universities and independent research organizations. The APC is composed of approximately 40 federally funded, interdisciplinary population research centers nationwide. Our members compete for federal discretionary research funding primarily from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF). Further, they use data gathered by federal statistical research agencies, including the Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), to conduct their scientific research and research training activities.

Passage of the Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA) of 2015 renews our organizations' collective hope that federal agencies that directly and indirectly support the population sciences will receive much needed funding increases in FY 2016. As you and your colleagues negotiate a final FY 2016 omnibus spending measure, we respectfully ask you to consider our support for the following agencies. Further, we ask you to consider our views regarding potential policy riders affecting these agencies.

**National Institutes of Health--\$32 billion**

Since 2003, funding for the NIH has failed to keep pace with medical research inflation, diminishing the agency's purchasing power by more than 20 percent. As a result, success rates have dramatically declined, new research initiatives and training programs have stalled, and fewer promising scientists are choosing research careers. PAA and APC hope the final FY 2016 omnibus bill will come as close to the funding level, \$32 billion, recommended by the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Subcommittee.

We are pleased neither the House nor Senate versions of the bill include policy riders affecting the agency's peer review process or ability to support specific research disciplines. We trust that the final omnibus measure will remain free of such objectionable provisions, as well. We urge the negotiators to reject a proposal in the House Labor, Health and Human Services and

Education appropriations bill to eliminate the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). Increased funding for the NIH cannot come at the expense of eliminating other important research agencies. AHRQ is an important source of data for our research community regarding patient outcomes and practices, and our organizations oppose attempts to eliminate it in the final FY 2016 omnibus spending measure.

### **National Science Foundation--\$7.7 billion**

We appreciate the Committee's continued commitment to funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF), which received an increase over FY 2015 levels, and are hopeful that additional resources made available via the BBA will bring the agency's funding level closer to the Administration's request, \$7.7 billion. We remain strongly opposed, however, to language in the House Commerce Science Justice appropriations report, restricting the allocation of funding among directorates by imposing strict limits to the Social, Behavioral and Economics (SBE) Directorate and the Geosciences. We join the broader science community and America's large research universities in opposing provisions that serve to politicize the allocation of federal research dollars or otherwise circumvent the rigorous merit review process that is considered the Gold Standard around the world.

### **Census Bureau--\$1.5 billion**

Fiscal Year 2016 is a pivotal year in the ramp up to the next decennial census, which the Administration's request, \$1.5 billion, reflects. The request includes \$1.22 billion for Periodic Censuses and Programs, which covers (in part) the 2020 Census and the American Community Survey (ACS). The House Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill (H.R. 2578) allocated only \$730.7 million for the Periodics account, *less than* the FY2015 funding level, at a time when decennial census activities must ramp-up considerably to keep planning and preparations on schedule. The Senate Appropriations Committee bill, while more generous, still allocates \$358 million less than the President requested for the Periodics account (\$1.22 billion), putting at risk the Census Bureau's ability to conduct the full range of planning and development activities needed to ensure a cost-effective and accurate census. We urge the negotiators to fund the Bureau at a level closer to the Administration's request and to reject language supported in the House that would make the ACS a voluntary, rather than mandatory, survey—an ill-informed policy change that would increase survey costs and decrease response rates dramatically, while also adversely affecting data quality (<http://www.thecensusproject.org/factsheets/acs/ACS-WhyWeNeedTheSurvey-FactSheet-March2015.pdf>).

### **Bureau of Labor Statistics--\$633 million**

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), which produces much of the most widely used federal economic and longitudinal data sets, has withstood years of belt-tightening and has worked heroically to maximize efficiency without compromising overall data quality. However, despite this commitment to thrift and efficiency, ongoing budget austerity has already resulted in the curtailment or outright elimination of important data collection programs. Further, the Senate's proposed FY 2016 funding level, \$579 million, is such a drastic reduction, that BLS would need to consider eliminating one of its major surveys, such as the American Time Use Survey or National Longitudinal Survey. While we appreciate the House FY 2016 funding

recommendation of \$609 million, we hope the omnibus bill will come closer to the Administration's request of \$633 million. This funding level would enable the agency to maintain its commitment to produce high quality data upon which so many enterprises—including the research community—rely.

**National Center for Health Statistics--\$172 million**

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) is the nation's premiere health statistical research agency and an essential source of data for population scientists studying issues, such as population aging, adolescent health, mortality trends, and health disparities. As members of the Friends of NCHS, PAA and APC support the Administration's FY 2016 request, \$172 million, which includes \$12 million from the mandatory Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF) to support an increase in the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) sample size. While we support the House recommendation of \$160 million, we urge the negotiators to fund the agency at a level closer to the Administration's request, \$172 million, which includes support from the PPHF. Without additional funds to support the sample size increases, the NHIS will not be able to make additional state estimates of health insurance coverage and other key estimates at the state-level, and will return to baseline with the ability to make reliable health insurance estimates for 30 states. While neither the House nor the Senate included money from the PPHF for NCHS, we urge the negotiators to reconsider the Administration's request.

Thank you for considering our organizations' views as you finalize the FY 2016 omnibus spending bill.

Sincerely,

Steve Ruggles, Ph.D.  
President, Population Association of America

Lisa Berkman, Ph.D.  
President, Association of Population Centers