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Overview of FY2020 Appropriations for the Census Bureau

Introduction

This In Focus presents an overview of FY2020 discretionary budget authority for the Census Bureau, including the FY2020 budget request, related congressional actions, and comparisons with FY2019 funding. As a Department of Commerce (DOC) agency, the bureau is funded through the Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) appropriations bills.

FY2020 Budget Request

The Administration's \$6,149.4 million FY2020 budget request for the Census Bureau is \$2,328.0 million (60.9%) above the \$3,821.4 million appropriated for FY2019. The FY2020 request is divided between the bureau's two major accounts, Current Surveys and Programs, and Periodic Censuses and Programs (PCP).

Current Surveys and Programs

The FY2020 request for Current Surveys and Programs is \$264.0 million, \$6.0 million (2.2%) less than the \$270.0 million enacted for FY2019. This account consists of Current Economic Statistics and Current Demographic Statistics.

Current Economic Statistics

Current Economic Statistics include business, construction, manufacturing, general economic, foreign trade, and government statistics that, as the FY2020 budget justification for the Census Bureau states, "provide critical information about the structure and function of the U.S. economy." These statistics, notes the justification, "are integral to the formation of key economic indicators, such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)."

The FY2020 request for Current Economic Statistics is \$185.3 million, \$411,000 (0.2%) above the \$184.9 million approved in the bureau's FY2019 spending plan.

Current Demographic Statistics

Current Demographic Statistics include those from household surveys like the Current Population Survey (CPS), which is undertaken jointly by the Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), is two-thirds funded by BLS, and provides monthly unemployment rates; analyses of population and housing characteristics, as in the *Current Population Reports*, which are based on CPS and other data and are the official source of U.S. income and poverty statistics; the Housing Vacancy Survey; intercensal demographic and housing unit estimates for the total United States and subnational geographic levels; and population projections into the future.

The \$78.7 million FY2020 Current Demographic Statistics request is \$6.4 million (7.5%) less than the \$85.1 million

the FY2019 spending plan approved and is consistent with a proposed cut in the Survey of Income and Program Participation sample size.

Periodic Censuses and Programs

Under the FY2020 request, Periodic Censuses and Programs would receive \$5,885.4 million, \$2,334.0 million (65.7%) above the FY2019-enacted \$3,551.4 million, and 95.7% of the Census Bureau's total FY2020 request, mainly to fund the 2020 decennial census. About \$3.6 million of the amount for PCP would be transferred to the DOC Office of Inspector General (OIG) for continuing bureau oversight.

Four major programs under PCP, plus the bureau's critical information technology initiative, are discussed below.

2020 Decennial Census

The bureau's largest, most costly undertaking is the decennial census. Article I, Section 2, clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution, as amended by Section 2 of the 14th Amendment, requires a population census every 10 years, to serve as the basis for apportioning seats in the House of Representatives. Decennial census data also are used to redraw state congressional and legislative districts and, along with census-related American Community Survey (ACS) data and intercensal estimates, in formulas to determine states' and localities' annual allocations of federal funds, estimated at between \$675 billion and over \$800 billion.

For the census in FY2020, the request is \$5,297.0 million. The budget justification states that another \$1,020.0 million in prior-year funds "will be available" for the census, plus \$83.3 million in information technology support through the bureau's newly developed Census Enterprise Data Collection and Processing system (CEDCaP), totaling \$6,400.3 million in FY2020 to support the census. The total amount, while not strictly comparable to the \$3,015.1 million approved in the FY2019 spending plan, exceeds this figure by \$3,385.1 million (112.3%) and reflects the peak year for census expenses.

American Community Survey

The ACS, which the bureau implemented nationwide in 2005 and 2006, is the replacement for the decennial census long form that, from 1940 to 2000, collected detailed socioeconomic and housing data from a sample of U.S. residents. The yearly ACS sample totals more than 3.5 million households, covering every U.S. county and the District of Columbia. The survey is sent monthly to small population samples; the results are aggregated to produce new estimates every year for areas with at least 65,000 people and every five years for areas from the most populous to those with fewer than 20,000 people.

According to the budget justification, the bureau releases more than 11 billion ACS estimates annually on more than 40 “social, demographic, housing, and economic” topics. The ACS “is the only source” of data on “many of these topics for rural areas and small populations.” A similar survey, the Puerto Rico Community Survey, is conducted across 78 county-equivalents there.

The FY2020 request for the ACS is \$218.0 million, \$6.6 million (3.1%) above the \$211.4 million the FY2019 spending plan approved. The budget justification notes that “an additional \$5.0 million in budgetary resources” for the ACS “will be derived from recoveries of prior year obligations from programs across” the PCP account.

Economic Census

The economic census originated early in the 19th century, when, the Census Bureau has written, “Congress responded to a rapid increase in industrial activity” by instructing 1810 census enumerators to “take an account of the several *manufacturing establishments and their manufactures*” within their purview. The modern economic census is conducted every five years. The budget justification states that this census “serves as the foundation for the measurement of U.S. businesses and their economic impact.” Economic census and related statistics provided to the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) are used “in setting the baseline” for gross domestic product (GDP) and other principal economic indicators.

During FY2020, data from the 2017 Economic Census will continue to be processed and reviewed for release, and general 2022 Economic Census planning and design of systems architecture will begin. The budget justification notes that “funding constraints throughout the economic census cycle” caused the bureau “to prioritize data releases needed by” BEA to calculate GDP and other economic indicators, in addition to planning for the 2022 census. Insofar as “resources permit, the program may release limited data publicly.”

The \$127.6 million FY2020 economic census request is \$28.1 million (28.3%) more than the \$99.5 million the FY2019 spending plan approved. The budget justification notes that, for the economic census and census of governments together, “an additional \$31.4 million in budgetary resources will be derived from recoveries of prior year obligations from programs across” the PCP account.

Census of Governments

The census of governments, conducted since 1957, is the bureau’s other major quinquennial census. The budget justification calls this census “the primary source of facts about the structure and function of the public sector of the U.S. economy,” which accounts for about 12% of GDP and 15% of the civilian labor force.

In FY2020, the bureau will continue processing and disseminating the finance components of the 2017 Census of Governments, and begin reengineering the 2022 census

to feature all-electronic responses and greater reliance on administrative records to reduce respondent burden.

The FY2020 census of governments request of \$12.0 million exceeds the \$8.8 million FY2019 spending plan amount by \$3.2 million (36.0%).

Census Enterprise Data Collection and Processing (CEDCaP) Program

According to the budget justification, CEDCaP will provide the “scaled and secured” data collection and processing systems that will “underpin” the 2020 census. The peak census operations to be supported include scanning and capturing data from paper census forms, making possible the submission of census responses online and by telephone, conducting field operations, and providing “workload control.”

For CEDCaP in FY2020, the request is \$83.3 million, \$4.4 million (5.6%) above the \$78.8 million approved in the FY2019 spending plan.

Congressional Action

House

On June 25, 2019, the House passed H.R. 3055, an FY2020 consolidated appropriations bill that would fund the CJS entities (under Division A), along with several other departments and agencies.

The House approved \$8,450.0 million for the Census Bureau in FY2020, \$4,628.6 million (121.1%) more than the \$3,821.4 million FY2019 enacted amount and \$2,300.6 million (37.4%) above the \$6,149.4 million FY2020 request. Current Surveys and Programs would receive \$275.0 million, \$5.0 million (1.9%) more than the \$270.0 million for FY2019 and \$11.0 million (4.2%) over the Administration’s \$264.0 million request for FY2020. The House approved \$8,175.0 million for Periodic Censuses and Programs, “to remain available until September 30, 2022.” Of this amount, \$675.0 million would be for “collecting, compiling, analyzing, preparing, and publishing” PCP statistics “provided for by law”; approximately \$3.6 million of the appropriation would be transferred to the DOC OIG for ongoing bureau oversight. The remaining \$7,500.0 million for PCP would be new budget authority for the 2020 census. The \$8,175.0 million PCP total is \$4,623.6 million (130.2%) above the \$3,551.4 million FY2019 enacted amount, and exceeds the \$5,885.4 million FY2020 request by \$2,289.6 million (38.9%).

Senate

The Senate has not yet introduced its version of FY2020 CJS legislation or acted on H.R. 3055.

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