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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 was \$2,328.0 million (60.9%) above the \$3,821.4 million appropriated for FY2019. The FY2020 request was 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 was \$264.0 million, \$6.0 million (2.2%) below the \$270.0 million enacted for FY2019. Under this account are 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 stated, "provide critical information" about the U.S. economy and underlie key economic indicators like gross domestic product (GDP).

The request for Current Economic Statistics in FY2020 was \$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 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) and 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 was \$6.4 million (7.5%) less than the \$85.1 million the FY2019 spending plan approved and was consistent with a proposed cut in the SIPP sample size.

Periodic Censuses and Programs

Under the FY2020 request, Periodic Censuses and Programs was to 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 was to 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 decennial census is the bureau's largest, most costly undertaking. Article I, Section 2, clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution, as amended by Section 2 of the 14th Amendment, requires a population count every 10 years, to apportion seats in the House of Representatives. The data also are used to redraw state congressional and legislative districts and, with census-related American Community Survey (ACS) data and intercensal estimates, in formulas to determine states' and localities' annual shares of federal funds, estimated at \$675 billion to about \$1.5 trillion.

The FY2020 request for the census was \$5,297.0 million. The budget justification stated that another \$1,020.0 million in prior-year funds was to "be available," plus \$83.3 million in information technology support through the bureau's new Census Enterprise Data Collection and Processing system (CEDCaP), totaling \$6,400.3 million in FY2020 to support the census. The total, while not strictly comparable to the \$3,015.1 million approved in the FY2019 spending plan, exceeded this figure by \$3,385.1 million (112.3%) and reflected 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. Sent monthly to small population samples, the ACS covers more than 3.5 million households yearly, in every U.S. county and the District of Columbia. The monthly data 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." Similarly, the Puerto Rico Community Survey, is conducted across 78 county-equivalents there.

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

Economic Census

The economic census originated 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*” under their purview. The modern economic census occurs every five years. It is, the budget justification stated, “the foundation” for measuring “U.S. businesses and their economic impact.” Economic census and related statistics provided to the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) set “the baseline” for GDP and other principal economic indicators.

During FY2020, 2017 Economic Census data will continue being readied for release, and 2022 census planning will begin. The budget justification noted that “funding constraints throughout the economic census cycle” caused the bureau “to prioritize data” needed by” BEA to calculate GDP and other economic indicators. As “resources permit, the program may release limited data publicly.”

The \$127.6 million FY2020 economic census request was \$28.1 million (28.3%) more than the \$99.5 million the FY2019 spending plan approved. The budget justification noted that, for the economic census and census of governments together, “an additional \$31.4 million in budgetary resources” was to “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 called 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 \$12.0 million FY2020 census of governments request exceeded 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 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 was \$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. Division A was to fund CJS, 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 FY2019-enacted amount and \$2,300.6 million (37.4%) above the FY2020 request. Current Surveys and Programs was to receive \$275.0 million, \$5.0 million (1.9%) more than in FY2019 and \$11.0 million (4.2%) over the FY2020 request. 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 was to be for “collecting, compiling, analyzing, preparing, and publishing” PCP statistics “provided for by law”; as requested in the budget proposal, about \$3.6 million of the appropriation was to be transferred to the DOC OIG for bureau oversight. (S. 2584; H.R. 3055, as amended and passed by the Senate; and the final FY2020 act, H.R. 1158, all discussed below, included this transfer.) The remaining \$7,500.0 million for PCP was to be new 2020 census budget authority. The \$8,175.0 million PCP total was \$4,623.6 million (130.2%) above the FY2019-enacted level and \$2,289.6 million (38.9%) over the FY2020 request.

Senate

On September 26, 2019, the Senate Appropriations Committee reported S. 2584, an FY2020 CJS appropriations bill, with \$7,558.3 million for the Census Bureau, \$3,736.9 million (97.8%) more than for FY2019, \$1,408.9 million (22.9%) above the FY2020 request, and \$891.7 million (10.6%) less than the House approved. Current Surveys and Programs was to receive \$274.0 million, \$4.0 million (1.5%) over the FY2019-enacted amount, \$10.0 million (3.8%) above the FY2020 request, and \$1.0 million (0.4%) less than the House approved. The \$7,284.3 million the committee recommended for PCP included \$6,696.0 million for the 2020 census. The PCP total, “to remain available until September 30, 2021,” exceeded the FY2019-enacted amount by \$3,732.9 million (105.1%), exceeded the FY2020 request by \$1,398.9 million (23.8%), and was \$890.7 million (10.9%) below what the House approved. The full Senate passed H.R. 3055, as amended, on October 31, 2019, approving the same amounts for the Census Bureau as reported in S. 2584.

Final Action

H.R. 1158, P.L. 116-93, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020, became law on December 20, 2019. Division B, which funded the CJS entities, provided the same amounts for the Census Bureau, Current Surveys and Programs, PCP, and the 2020 census as reported in S. 2584.

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