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Overview of FY2019 Appropriations for the Census Bureau

Introduction

This In Focus presents an overview of FY2019 discretionary budget authority for the Census Bureau, including the FY2019 budget request, related congressional actions, and comparisons with FY2018 amounts. As a Department of Commerce agency, the bureau is funded through Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) appropriations bills.

FY2019 Budget Request

The Administration's FY2019 budget request for the Census Bureau was \$3,800.5 million, \$986.5 million (35.1%) above the \$2,814.0 million appropriation in FY2018. The bureau's FY2018 spend plan approved \$2,811.4 million—the enacted amount, minus a transfer of \$2.6 million to the Commerce Department's Office of Inspector General (DOC OIG) for bureau oversight. The FY2019 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 Current Surveys and Programs account would have received \$249.1 million in FY2019, \$20.9 million (7.7%) below the \$270.0 million appropriated for FY2018, \$16.9 million (6.3%) less than the \$266.0 million approved in the FY2018 spend plan, and 6.6% of the FY2019 total request for the bureau. 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 stated in the FY2019 budget justification for the Census Bureau, “provide critical information about the structure and function of the U.S. economy.” These statistics, the justification noted, “are integral to the formation of key economic indicators, such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).”

The FY2019 request for Current Economic Statistics was \$174.0 million, \$6.9 million (3.8%) below the \$180.9 million that the bureau's spend plan approved for FY2018.

Current Demographic Statistics

Current Demographic Statistics include those from household surveys like the Current Population Survey (CPS), a collaborative venture between the Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), for which BLS assumes about two-thirds of the cost; analyses of population and housing characteristics, such as the *Current Population Reports*, based on CPS and other data and providing the official estimates of income and poverty; intercensal demographic and housing unit estimates for the total United

States and subnational geographic levels; and population projections into the future.

The request for Current Demographic Statistics in FY2019 was \$75.1 million, \$10.0 million (11.7%) less than the \$85.1 million approved in the FY2018 spend plan.

Periodic Censuses and Programs (PCP)

The Periodic Censuses and Programs account would have received \$3,551.4 million, \$1,007.4 million (39.6%) more than the \$2,544.0 million enacted for FY2018, \$1,006.0 million (39.5%) above the \$2,545.4 million provided in the FY2018 spend plan, and 93.4% of the bureau's total FY2019 request. Four major programs under PCP, plus the bureau's critical information technology initiative, are discussed below.

2020 Decennial Census

The largest, most expensive bureau undertaking is the decennial census. Article I, Section 2, clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution, as modified 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 for within-state redistricting and, along with census-related American Community Survey (ACS) data and intercensal estimates, in certain formulas that partly or entirely determine the annual allocation of over \$675 billion in federal funds to states and localities.

The \$3,015.1 million FY2019 request for the 2020 census was \$920.3 million (43.9%) above the \$2,094.9 million the spend plan approved for FY2018. The steep increase reflects the fact that the census is little more than a year away, and, after several years of “ramping up,” census operations are nearing their peak.

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 ACS yearly sample totals about 3.5 million households, covering every U.S. county, the District of Columbia, and all Puerto Rican municipalities. The survey is sent monthly to small population samples; the results are aggregated to produce data 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.”

The FY2019 request for the ACS was \$211.4 million, \$2.2 million (1.0%) below the \$213.6 million approved in the FY2018 spend plan. The budget justification noted that “an additional \$5.0 million in budgetary resources” for the ACS would “be derived from recoveries of prior year obligations from programs across” the PCP account. The document also stated that the bureau would save money by discontinuing its “less effective” use of the telephone to contact people who do not respond to the ACS, and would increase its “more effective” personal visits for nonresponse follow-up.

2017 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 manufactures” within their purview. The modern economic census is conducted every five years. The budget justification stated that economic census products “are the foundation” for “key measures of economic performance,” including the gross domestic product (GDP) and the national income and product accounts. Almost all major federal “economic statistical series” depend “directly or indirectly” on this census. The FY2019 request for the 2017 Economic Census was \$99.5 million, \$5.6 million (5.4%) below the \$105.1 million approved in the FY2018 spend plan. The budget justification noted that “an additional \$28.5 million in budgetary resources” for this census was to “be derived from recoveries of prior year obligations from programs across” the PCP account.

In FY2019, the bureau expects to finish 2017 Economic Census data collection, now based entirely on internet reporting, and begin data processing and dissemination.

2017 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.

The FY2019 request for the 2017 Census of Governments was \$8.8 million, \$382,000 (4.5%) more than the \$8.4 million that the FY2018 spend plan approved. According to the budget justification, “an additional \$2.9 million in budgetary resources” for this census was to “be derived from recoveries of prior year obligations from programs across” the PCP account.

In this fiscal year, the 2017 census will focus on data collection, which is to be 100% electronic, and processing.

Census Enterprise Data Collection and Processing System (CEDCaP)

FY2019 is the fifth year for CEDCaP, funded under PCP. The budget justification stated that CEDCaP “creates an integrated and standardized enterprise suite of systems that offers shared data collection and processing services.”

The FY2019 request for CEDCaP was \$78.8 million, \$71.2 million (934.9%) above the \$7.6 million approved in the FY2018 spend plan. The request reflected, as the budget justification stated, “CEDCaP’s work in concert with the

2020 program increase,” including resolving “technical defects found during the 2018 End-to-End Census Test.”

House Appropriations Committee Action

The House Committee on Appropriations reported H.R. 5952, the House FY2019 CJS appropriations bill, on May 24, 2018, recommending \$4,799.7 million for the Census Bureau, with \$270.0 million for Current Surveys and Programs and \$4,529.7 million for PCP. The bureau would have received \$1,985.7 million (70.6%) more than the \$2,814.0 million FY2018-enacted amount and \$999.2 million (26.3%) over the \$3,800.5 million request. The amount for Current Surveys and Programs was the same as enacted for FY2018, \$4.0 million (1.5%) more than the \$266.0 million approved in the FY2018 spend plan, and \$20.9 million (8.4%) above the \$249.1 million request. The recommendation for PCP exceeded the FY2018-enacted \$2,544.0 million by \$1,985.7 million (78.1%), the FY2018 spend-plan amount of \$2,545.4 million by \$1,984.3 million (78.0%), and the FY2019 request of \$3,551.4 million by \$978.3 million (27.5%).

Senate Appropriations Committee Action

The Senate Committee on Appropriations reported S. 3072, the Senate FY2019 CJS appropriations bill, on June 14, 2018, with a recommendation of \$3,821.4 million for the Census Bureau, including \$270.0 million for Current Surveys and Programs and \$3,551.4 million for PCP. The recommendation for the bureau exceeded the FY2018-enacted amount by \$1,007.4 million (35.8%), exceeded the request by \$20.9 million (0.5%), and was \$978.3 million (20.4%) below the House committee’s recommendation. Current Surveys and Programs was to receive \$270.0 million, the same as enacted for FY2018 and recommended by the House committee for FY2019, \$4.0 million (1.5%) more than the spend plan approved for FY2018, and \$20.9 million (8.4%) above the FY2019 request. PCP would have received the amount requested, \$1,007.4 million (39.6%) more than enacted for FY2018, \$1,006.0 million (39.5%) above the FY2018 spend-plan amount, and \$978.3 million (21.6%) less than the House committee recommended. The Senate, like the House, appropriators called for transferring \$3.6 million from PCP to the Commerce Department’s OIG for continued bureau oversight.

Final Action on CJS FY2019 Funding

FY2018 ended without final action on CJS FY2019 appropriations. H.J.Res. 31, P.L. 116-6, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019, became law on February 15, 2019. Division C funded CJS; of the \$3,821.4 million provided for the Census Bureau, \$270.0 million was for Current Surveys and Programs (as both appropriations committees recommended), and \$3,551.4 million was for PCP (the same as requested and as recommended by Senate appropriators), with a transfer of \$3.6 million from PCP to the DOC OIG for ongoing bureau oversight.

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