



March 2, 2021

Sheleen Dumas
Department PRA Clearance Officer
Office of the Chief Information Officer
Commerce Department

Re: Comment on the Household Pulse Survey, OMB Control Number: 0607–1013

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the inclusion of additional child care questions in the Household Pulse Survey During COVID-19 (OMB Control Number 0607-1013). The Bipartisan Policy Center's Early Childhood Initiative commends the Census Bureau on recognizing the importance of understanding how families are interacting with child care during this health and economic crisis. BPC strongly encourages the U.S. Census Bureau to collect new data on how much families are currently paying for child care. For reasons outlined below, these data are critical for policymakers to make informed decisions about where to target financial supports for child care.

One of the biggest issues families with children face is being unable to access or afford child care. Many parents now working from home are trying to balance child caregiving needs with work demands, and parents who are on the frontlines and unable to work from home are struggling to find affordable child care as many programs have been forced to operate at reduced capacity and with heightened health and safety costs. It is essential that policymakers have access to data that indicates how these conditions are affecting the financial status of both parents and providers.

To collect this data, BPC proposes the inclusion of the following questions:

(1) "Are you currently paying for child care?"

This question would provide an important indicator of whether parents are paying for formal child care throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Asked over several weeks, this question would enable researchers and policymakers to identify relative changes in formal child care use to gauge the enrollment status of our country's vital child care businesses.

(2) "If yes, how much did you and your household spend on child care in the last seven days?"

The second question would provide novel data on whether the increased cost burden of providing safe, high-quality child care during the health crisis is falling on families or providers. Data gathered from this question could be compared to child care expenditure data collected by the Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey to understand the relative changes from prior to the pandemic to now of child care costs for families. While a [December 2020 survey](#) of parents conducted by BPC and Morning Consult reveals the amounts parents can afford to pay for child care during the pandemic, there are currently no nationally representative data on how much parents actually pay.

The addition of these two questions would provide the country with data on how many families are paying for child care and how much they are spending. However, it would not offer information on how parents are managing to cover child care expenses, and specifically, if existing government relief has



helped with these expenses. To better understand this, BPC encourages the following addition to Question 19 of the Household Pulse Survey, distributed beginning January 2021.

Question 19 of the Household Pulse Survey asks respondents how they mostly spent their recent stimulus payment. The question presents a number of major expenses from which respondents can choose—including food, household items, and rent—yet the list has a major gap: it does not include child care as a major expense. The inclusion of “child care” as an option can help the country understand whether stimulus check payments have eased the burden of child care costs for families.

The Household Pulse Survey is the most capable of collecting accurate data on child care expenses because of its large, representative sample and regular updates. We strongly encourage the inclusion of the questions highlighted above and copied below as our economy will not recover without child care. We need the best data possible to know how to support working parents and the businesses that rely on them to succeed. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Linda K. Smith
Director, Early Childhood Initiative
Bipartisan Policy Center

Summary of Survey Additions and Revisions

Request for Inclusion of New Questions:

- 1) “Are you currently paying for child care?”
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 2) [If YES above] “During the last seven days, how much money did you and your household spend on child care?”
 - a) Enter Amount: _____

Revisions to Previous Question:

- Q19: “What did you and your household mostly spend the most recent “stimulus payment” on?”
 - Request to include an option for “Child care”