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January 16, 2018

Jennifer Jessup

Departmental Paperwork Clearance Officer

Department of Commerce, Room 6616

14th and Constitution Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20230

Re: American Community Survey Methods Panel Test, Docket number: USBC-2017-0006

Dear Ms. Jessup:

On behalf of Asian Americans Advancing Justice-AAJC, NALEO Educational Fund, the National LGBTQ Task Force, members of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and other undersigned organizations, we appreciate this opportunity to address the American Community Survey (ACS) Methods Panel Test plan. As advocates, researchers, and litigators we understand the importance of fielding a successful American Community Survey; the ACS has a direct impact on federal funding allocation, on democratic representation, on our ability to illustrate inequality, and on our understanding of the communities we serve. We strongly support the Bureau's continuous efforts to improve the American Community Survey. To that end, we urge you to adopt the recommendations below concerning self-response messaging, burden evaluation, administrative records, group quarters, and content tests.

Self-Response Mail Messaging Tests

Our organizations are acutely concerned about the trend of reduced self-response rates to Census Bureau surveys, and we applaud the Bureau's intention to study messaging that may increase self-response. The public's confidence in the security and confidentiality of survey responses is a key factor in determining whether and under what circumstances individuals self-respond.

As the Bureau is aware, members of immigrant households and communities have become more reluctant to interact with governmental entities since President Donald Trump's Administration altered immigration enforcement priorities, and stated its intention to accelerate removal of undocumented immigrants from the United States. Broad groups of U.S. residents have become increasingly wary of providing information to the government as awareness has spread of hacking incidents in which large amounts of personal data were stolen from federal databases. In light of these and similar impending challenges to securing adequate levels of self-response, the Bureau must test messaging that aims to convince respondents that their personal information will not be stolen and cannot be disclosed for any

non-statistical purpose; oversample among the hardest-to-reach communities; and devote resources to communicating in-language with as much as possible of the resident population not yet fully fluent in English.

Response Burden Field Test

The undersigned support the Bureau's efforts to better understand respondents' perception of the burden of completing the American Community Survey. Proposed solutions to the issue of response burden included using administrative records, improving sampling, tailoring group quarters data collection, and building respondent support for the ACS. The undersigned strongly believe that solutions that focus on building respondent support for the ACS are the most effective way to reduce response burden and should be the main focus on the Bureau's efforts.

Focusing on building respondent support for the ACS is likely to improve data quality and reduce the cost of non-response follow-up for the Bureau. The Bureau currently has a number of materials that are intended to improve public perception of the ACS, including their "Why We Ask" materials. Investing more resources in reworking the "Why We Ask" materials and undertaking additional efforts to improve public perception of the ACS is the most effective and efficient solution to reducing respondent burden. Therefore, the undersigned recommend that questions tested on the ACS Methods Panel Tests should reflect an intention to address respondent burden through improved public perception.

Testing the Use of Administrative Data in Housing Units and Group Quarters

The undersigned organizations appreciate the potential value of the Bureau's proposal to test the use of administrative records in lieu of normal methods of surveying; however, we are concerned that enumeration that solely relies on administrative records may significantly reduce the quality and quantity of information included in Census data releases about the nation's hardest-to-reach populations. We urge the Bureau to employ a critical eye as it conducts this testing, and to decline to adopt widely any use of administrative records that it finds tends to reduce the reliability of resulting data. The benefit of any cost savings in data collection would be far outweighed by the damage that inaccurate and unusable data could cause to the many sectors and government functions that rely upon ACS statistics.

Because the Bureau has expressed specific interest in potential use of administrative records as an alternative to traditional enumeration of institutional group quarters, we want to draw its attention to the unique characteristics and circumstances associated with that context. As you know, members of hard-to-count communities are overrepresented among residents of institutional group quarters: for example, according to the federal Bureau of Prisons, as of November 2017, 38% of federal inmates were African American, compared to only 13.3% of the nation's total population as of July 2016; the same data compilations found 32.8% of inmates were Latino, compared to just 17.8% of all residents. Likewise, low-income individuals are likely to constitute disproportionate shares of nursing home residents: whereas Medicaid covers about 20% of all Americans, the program pays for the costs of care for approximately three-fourths of nursing home residents as of 2015, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. We are concerned that administrative records pertaining to these hard-to-count residents of

institutional group quarters are of particularly poor quality in at least some respects, and we therefore urge the Bureau to apply strong scrutiny to this proposed area of research, or in the alternative, to identify more promising potential uses of administrative records for testing.

Group Quarters Test

The undersigned support the Bureau's intention to test giving group quarters respondents the option of completing the survey via self-response using an Internet instrument, as recommended to the Bureau by the Census Scientific Advisory Committee's Working Group on Group Quarters in the American Community Survey. As the Working Group clearly explained, 79% of non-institutional group quarters respondents are college students or military personnel, and are likely to have strong computer skills. Allowing these non-institutional group quarters residents to self-respond should lower costs and improve data quality.

Content Tests

As a part of its recurring process of assessing what questions should be added to or removed from the American Community Survey, the Census Bureau consulted with colleagues at federal agencies to determine their data needs. Several federal agencies expressed a clear and unmitigated need to obtain data on sexual orientation and gender identity in order to effectively allocate resources and to implement and enforce provisions of the law.

Although the Census Bureau chose not to include sexual orientation or gender identity questions in the current iteration of the American Community Survey, it is clear from the response of agencies like the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Justice that there is a significant need for this data for implementation and enforcement activities and for efficient allocation of resources.

The Bureau must begin testing sexual orientation and gender identity questions for inclusion on the American Community Survey immediately. The Content Tests proposed as part of the Methods Panel Tests provide an ideal opportunity for the Bureau to begin this testing.

Language Support

To help ensure a successful language assistance program, we suggest the following non-exhaustive list of considerations. We believe that in order to reach hard-to-count groups that include high numbers of immigrants and persons with limited English proficiency, the internet interfaces must include as many languages as possible, with online forms potentially including more languages than printed versions. We also think it is important to prioritize language minority communities with a high incidence of LEP; that is, the Census Bureau should consider not only the number of speakers, but also smaller language communities that can only respond in their own language. The Census Bureau should also incorporate trusted community-based organizations in reviewing all non-English materials, including, but not limited to, any glossaries, non-English mailing materials, and the Census Questionnaire, while allowing sufficient

time and appropriate vehicles for organizations to provide input on cultural appropriateness and translation quality prior to finalizing translations and materials. Additionally, we believe the Census Bureau should develop educational and communications materials with simpler messages and plain-language translations. In 2010, community members found the Census-produced materials to be too dense and text-heavy, and in some cases, too complicated for those who may not be literate in their own native language.

The undersigned appreciate this opportunity to comment on the American Community Methods Panel Tests proposal. For more information on any of the topics addressed in this comment, please contact Meghan Maury, National LGBTQ Task Force, at mmaury@thetaskforce.org; Terry Ao Minnis, Asian Americans Advancing Justice| AAJC, at tminnis@advancingjustice-aajc.org or Erin Hustings, National Association of Latino Elected Officials, ehustings@naleo.org.

Sincerely,

Asian Americans Advancing Justice|AAJC
National Association of Latino Elected Officials
National LGBTQ Task Force
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
18MillionRising.org
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American GI Forum of the US
American-Arab anti-Discrimination Committee
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
CenterLink: The Community Of LGBT Centers
Council on American-Islamic Relations, California
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)
Equality California
Family Equality Council
Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality
Impact Fund
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
Mi Familia Vota
Movement Advancement Project
NAACP
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Coalition for LGBT Health
National Council of Jewish Women
National Disability Rights Network
National Education Association

National Education Association
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Latina/o Psychological Association
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates
SER Jobs for Progress National Inc.
State Voices
Transgender Law Center
UnidosUS