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February 1, 2019

The Honorable Steven Dillingham
Director
U.S. Census Bureau
4600 Silver Hill Road
Washington, DC 20233

Dear Dr. Dillingham:

Congratulations on your recent confirmation. I look forward to working with you.

As you may already know, the 2010 Census was the most expensive in history, costing about \$12.3 billion. With the 2020 Decennial Census (2020 Census) quickly approaching, the Bureau must ensure that it produces an accurate count while controlling costs.

I am encouraged that the Census Bureau (Bureau) is trying to reduce these costs. The changes the Bureau has unveiled for the 2020 Census—such as permitting respondents to complete their forms online, reengineering data collection methods, and using administrative records to limit follow-up—could help save important tax dollars.

But despite these changes, the Bureau's estimated costs for the 2020 Census continue to rise. In December 2017, the Bureau estimated the total cost of the redesigned census to be about \$15.6 billion¹—including a \$1.2 billion Secretarial-Controlled Contingency fund for unforeseen events.² This is a significant increase from the 2010 Census.

Information technology (IT) appears to be a major driver of the increased cost estimate. The Bureau reports that estimated IT costs grew by \$1.56 billion—from \$3.41 billion to \$4.97 billion—between October 2015 and December 2017.³ According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the Bureau faces challenges managing and overseeing the IT

¹ U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2020 Census Life-cycle Cost Estimate Executive Summary, at 6 (2017), <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/planning-docs/2020-cost-estimate1.pdf>.

² *Id.* at 21.

³ U.S. Gov't Accountability Office, GAO-18-655, 2020 Census: Continued Management Attention Needed to Address Challenges and Risks with Developing, Testing, and Securing IT Systems, at 14 (2018), <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-18-655>.

programs, systems, and contracts supporting the 2020 Census.⁴ For example, as of June 2018, the Bureau reported that 33 of the 58 positions in the office that oversees the key technology integration contractor—the Bureau’s largest contract—are vacant. These vacancies diminish the Bureau’s ability to conduct oversight of this important contractor, which could lead to additional costs, performance issues, and scheduling delays.

Indeed, threats to the Bureau’s schedule and budget have already emerged. According to GAO, the Bureau delayed key IT milestones, and several systems experienced problems during the 2018 end-to-end test that must be addressed.⁵ As a result, GAO reports that the Bureau has compressed its timelines and has rushed or ignored important security and risk assessments, putting these IT systems at risk of not functioning or being vulnerable to security threats. Addressing these challenges will likely lead to further increased costs, such as additional staff or new technology.

Staffing presents another challenge for the Bureau. It will need to hire thousands of temporary employees to promote the census and to conduct follow-up on households that fail to return their census questionnaires. The rate at which households return census questionnaires is declining, increasing the number of employees needed to conduct follow-up.⁶ That rate is not expected to improve in 2020, so the Bureau likely will have to embark on another large follow-up operation. Adding to this challenge is the tight labor market created by low unemployment, which will make it difficult to hire temporary employees at cost-effective rates.

Given the importance of the 2020 Census and the budget risks associated with its operation, I request your assistance in providing me with the following information:

1. Has the Bureau made progress in filling the positions needed to oversee the integration contractor?
2. What steps does the Bureau plan to take to ensure that future costs, particularly in-person canvassing costs, are consistent with estimates? How does the Bureau identify the causes of cost variances, and does it adjust estimates as a result?
3. What are the Bureau’s plans to ensure that IT systems are fully tested on time and that any security weaknesses are appropriately addressed before systems are deployed? Are there plans to hire more staff? Does the Bureau foresee further delays in the future?
4. What disaster-recovery measures are in place to help ensure that critical IT systems and infrastructure remain available in the event of a significant cyber-attack or unexpected disruption of service?

⁴ U.S. Gov’t Accountability Office, GAO-18-543T, 2020 Census: Actions Needed to Mitigate Key Risks Jeopardizing a Cost-Effective and Secure Enumeration (2018), <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-18-543T>.

⁵ See *supra* note 3 at 9.

⁶ U.S. Gov’t Accountability Office, GAO-18-215T, 2020 Census S: Actions Needed to Mitigate Key Risks Jeopardizing a Cost-Effective Enumeration (2017), <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-18-215T>.

5. What are the rules governing use of the Census' contingency money? How will the Bureau and Department of Commerce determine when to use this money?
6. Given tight labor markets, what specific pay-rate contingencies is the Bureau considering, if any, for hiring the large increase in temporary employees needed to promote the census beginning in the next few months, as well as the hundreds of thousands of temporary employees needed for fieldwork later in the census cycle?

Please provide your response in writing by February 15, 2019.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter. If you have any questions about this request, please have your staff contact John Lin on the Budget Committee staff at 202-224-0642.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael B. Enzi". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael B. Enzi
Chairman