April 29, 2019

The Honorable José Serrano
Chairman

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Oversight Hearing: 2020 Census Preparation

Dear Chairman Serrano and Ranking Member Aderholt:

The Committee of Economic Development (CED) is writing regarding the oversight hearing on the 2020 Census preparation scheduled for Tuesday, April 30, 2019. CED is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, business-led public policy think tank with a rich history dating back to the Marshall Plan.

As you prepare for tomorrow’s hearing, we would like to offer the following observations based on a new CED Policy Brief, “The 2020 Census: The Importance of an Accurate and Robust Accounting of our Nation’s Population.” With less than a year before the census begins, the report warns of the significant challenges facing the Census Bureau and urges Congress to ensure that the agency has adequate leadership, funding and staffing to generate a complete and accurate count.

Specifically, the report outlines the following challenges facing the agency:

- Lack of funding – For the first time, American residents will be able to respond to the census questions online. However, unexpectedly high technology costs and underfunding from Congress have caused the agency to delay some outreach programs and cancel others.

- Workforce shortage – A strong economy and low unemployment rate could make hiring of thousands of census workers difficult.
• Legal challenges – The agency faces several lawsuits focused on the decision to include a citizenship question on the 2020 survey.

An efficient and accurate census count is a CED priority. Census information is critical for the public and the private sectors. It is “an invaluable tool for the business community. It stands as the single best source of data about demographics and economic changes, and facilitates more informed and forward-looking business decision-making,” noted this Opinion co-authored by a group of business leaders and a former Congressman in the Sun-Sentinel today – all Trustees of CED.

The census is also the foundation of fair political representation, and hundreds of billions of federal funds are distributed based on census data to states and localities.

We believe the census is a public good that serves as a vital information resource for the decade to come. As you prepare for the hearing tomorrow, we urge Congress to ensure that funding and staffing is commensurate with the task.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Bernard C. Bailey, PhD
President
Committee for Economic Development (CED)

cc: Members of the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Committee on Appropriations