

# **DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

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**ECONOMICS  
AND  
STATISTICS  
ADMINISTRATION**

**Office of the  
Under Secretary**

## **PREPARED STATEMENT OF**

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

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Intergovernmental Relations and the Census**

**U.S. House of Representatives**

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On behalf of the Department of Commerce and Secretary Evans, I am pleased to be here today to express the Administration's support for the American Community Survey. This program is an integral component of the Census Bureau's plans for a successful 2010 census and we hope it will receive the full support of Congress this year.

The American Community Survey is a well-developed program. Since 1996, the Census Bureau has tested the ability of the American Community Survey to meet the obligations of the decennial census long form: accurate, census-tract level data on an annual basis. There are 31 test sites located throughout the nation in which the American Community Survey is at "full implementation"—surveying thousands of households on a monthly basis. Local governments and planning organizations in the 31 test sites, including Fulton County, Pennsylvania and the Bronx, are already using these data for planning and decision-making. In addition, to determine the comparability of the new American Community Survey with the traditional census long form, the Census Bureau has conducted surveys of 700,000 households across the country since 2000. This has enabled the Bureau to test the data collection and determine the feasibility of collecting long form data each month on a national basis. The American Community Survey has delivered consistently high quality data in these test programs.

The defining difference between the American Community Survey and all other data products, including the decennial census, is that this program will deliver detailed data for every geography on a yearly basis. This is a rapidly growing, changing nation — during the three years since the 2000 census, changes have taken place in our cities, towns, and communities. Dramatic changes do not wait for data. People are born, and they grow-up, wed, move, produce families, open businesses, retire, and die. There are plant openings, hurricanes, floods, base closings, new shopping malls, new interstate highways, and other events taking place on daily basis indelibly changing the life of a community. Every local government, however, will face a certain degree of difficulty in trying to keep pace with such changes. In fact, as I sit before you

today, New York City, especially lower Manhattan, has changed in profound ways that have yet to be measured. The data that Joe Salvo of the New York City Planning Department must use from Census 2000—the most accurate source of detailed, small area data—are now essentially a matter of history.

The long form from the decennial census offers a comprehensive and in-depth snapshot of the conditions as of Census Day; it cannot provide timely, annual data. Delivering data once in a decade served this nation well in the past. Today, however, we believe that the American Community Survey offers an alternative that is more timely and more relevant to meet the needs — both public and private — of our nation. And the Department of Commerce believes the need for these annual data obliges us to pursue the American Community Survey.

The American Community Survey offers an alternative that is more timely and more useful to you and other census data users. The American Community Survey will deliver quality data comparable to the long form each year. The American Community Survey questionnaire is essentially the same as the long form from Census 2000, because the data must meet the same statutory and regulatory obligations and responsibilities. The Census Bureau has worked many years with other Federal agencies to ensure that the answers to those questions will provide the data they require to run programs and meet the needs of their stakeholders. For instance, one of the most intrusive questions, “does this house, apartment, or mobile home have complete plumbing facilities?” is used by several Federal departments and agencies, including the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Indian Health Service. This question has direct implications on issues of public health and well-being, including access and efficiency of sanitation services and the condition of housing in remote, rural areas and in low-income neighborhoods.

Other examples of American Community Survey questions include,

- “At what location did this person work last week?”
- “How did this person usually get to work last week?”
- “What time did this person usually leave home to go to work last week?”
- “How many minutes did it usually take this person to get from home to work last week?”

Answers to these questions provide the basis for the commuting data—including the average commuting time—that are required to meet the obligations of the Highway Safety Act and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century [TEA-21]. The questions provide the information necessary to describe the geographic patterns of commuter travel and the volume of travel for traffic flows between communities. Evaluations of traffic congestion, air quality, public transportation needs...these are each developed from the answers to these questions.

The questions on income provide data to inform the National School Lunch Program, which provides nutritious meals to children of low-income families. It also helps to meet the needs of the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program. The Department of Justice requires these data to determine disparities in voter participation and other enforcement responsibilities of the Voting Rights Act.

The content needs reflected in these questions, as well as the rest of the questions on the American Community Survey, were evaluated by an interagency committee organized by the Office of Management and Budget. In addition, the Department of Commerce took the unprecedented step to seek affirmation of these needs from the legal offices of each department or agency. The results, which I would like to enter into the record of this hearing, indicate far-ranging and diverse uses for the American Community Survey data. Each of these questions meets data needs that are required by Federal statute, regulation, or court judgment.

While the data needs that each question serves may not be immediately evident, many of these questions provide data that affect the daily lives of every person. The Census Bureau's field employees must be prepared to answer effectively the question, "Why does the government need to know?"

That is the key question. For an individual, our answer will explain why they should trust the Census Bureau and give their information to us. For you and other census data users, the answer may mean more schools to an overcrowded school district, better roads for a rapidly expanding region, or more opportunities for entrepreneurs and businesses.

Their answers, however, do not belong solely to the government. This country has a compelling need for reliable, timely data— and not only with a government, but also non-profit organizations, private corporations, small businesses, and entrepreneurs. Just the other day, I read of a man, who at age 57, suddenly found himself an out-of-work executive in a market saturated with out-of-work executives. Since a new job that duplicated his income and title seemed out of reach, he and his wife decided to start a business instead. Then, according to Forbes magazine, "they plowed through census data" looking for markets with demographic characteristics of those interested in their product. As this example illustrates, access to yearly data can help businesses grow, help governments adapt, and help Congress legislate.

The Commerce Department believes that the American Community Survey is the best source for timely, yearly data that will serve this nation more effectively and this is an important goal for this Administration. We are encouraged by the work that the Census Bureau has done thus far to meet this goal and we hope that Congress will support these efforts.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer your questions.