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Congress of the United States  
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READINESS

January 13, 2022

Robert Santos  
Director  
U.S. Census Bureau  
4600 Silver Hill Road  
Washington, DC 20233

Director Santos,

In light of the statistical gaps between the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) and 2020 Census results<sup>12</sup>, I'm writing to ask that you expand the Census Bureau's review of the 2020 ACS methodology beyond the impact of the coronavirus pandemic to a broader review of modernizing, updating, and improving the ACS to provide data more reflective of reality on the ground and more closely aligned with the decennial census.<sup>3</sup>

As you know, the ACS is crucial for collecting yearly information on the American public to help local governments make policy decisions to best improve communities across the country and to help businesses adequately serve their customers while planning for the future. I know the U.S. Census Bureau is committed to the integrity and accuracy of both the ACS and the decennial Census and had that belief reaffirmed through the agency's difficult decision last year to delay the release of 2020 ACS data before releasing it in an "experimental form" and announcing plans for a methodological review to ensure that "the resulting data meet our quality standards."<sup>4</sup>

In the interests of reaffirming that longstanding commitment to data quality, I am writing to request that you extend your agency's methodological review of the ACS beyond the COVID-19 pandemic-impacted results to the general practices employed in generating the ACS. As you know, your work is vitally important to our country and while perfect data is impossible, even small errors and margins of error can carry enormous consequences, demanding an aggressive, continuous pursuit of improvement.

The impact of ACS data on public understanding and policymaking is significant, and in recent years, the challenges of inconsistencies between those projections and the Census have sown doubt, confusion, and overreaction. For example, over the course of the last decade, my home state of Illinois' population decline has been a major story, driving a range of policy debates and disagreements based on ACS projections. However, 2020 Census results suggested that those reports of population decline may have been notably overstated.

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<sup>1</sup> [2019 ACS 5-Year Estimate Data Profile](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Census Bureau Press Release, "New Vintage 2021 Population Estimates Available for the Nation, States and Puerto Rico", December 21, 2021](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Census Bureau Press Release, "Census Bureau Statement on 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Data", December 20, 2021](#)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

Last month, your agency again reported that Illinois' population was in a state of decline, but the experience of the previous ten years of reports followed by the census has led this result to be met with a degree of skepticism and some diminishment of trust in ACS data.<sup>5</sup> While statistical projections carry the inevitable margins of error and those populations also vary substantially month to month and year to year across the country, your agency's data is essential to the function of our democracy and economy and so is public trust in that data.

A new methodological review that can address potential shortcomings in general ACS function, analysis, and collection would not only strengthen the quality of ACS data but also highlight areas of need or investment by which Congress can help the Census Bureau meet the data needs of this century. In this interest, I request that the U.S. Census Bureau conduct such a review beyond the scope of the challenges of this pandemic while highlighting avenues through which the agency can improve, and Congress can help it improve, to ensure Americans have access to the highest quality data about our nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Raja Krishnamoorthi', with a stylized, flowing script.

Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Member of Congress

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<sup>5</sup> [Census Bureau Press Release, "New Vintage 2021 Population Estimates Available for the Nation, States and Puerto Rico", December 21, 2021](#)