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Testimony before the House Committee on Government Reform, Subcommittee on Federalism and the Census

“Apportionment in the Balance: A Look into the Progress of the 2010 Decennial Census”

March 1, 2006

## **Introduction**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, good morning. I am Andrew Reamer, Deputy Director of the Urban Markets Initiative (UMI) in the Metropolitan Policy Program of the Brookings Institution. I very much appreciate the opportunity to appear before this subcommittee to discuss the elements necessary to the design and implementation of a successful 2010 Census.

At Brookings, UMI’s mission is to stimulate greater private and public investment in urban communities through improving the demographic, social, and economic data available on these communities. Accurate, accessible data lead to better understanding of investment opportunities and needs, which in turn lead to greater and more effective investments. In this regard, the single most important dataset, by far, is that provided by the Decennial Census. An accurate count of population by neighborhood and a profile of basic population characteristics, such as age, race, and ethnicity, are absolutely essential information for businesses all across America that need to assess markets. It is no understatement to say that the vitality of America’s businesses and economy relies significantly on a successful Census.

As the title of this hearing suggests, the Decennial Census has an even more essential public purpose—providing the foundation for apportionment and redistricting. The Decennial Census is the platform on which we build our democracy at the federal, the state, and the local levels. Seats in Congress, in state legislatures, and in city councils, seats in the Electoral College for choosing our President, are allocated on the basis of the Census. The Census as the fundamental mechanism for

recreating our democracy every ten years is enshrined in the Constitution. The fairness of this democracy is a function of the accuracy of the Census.

An accurate Census also is essential for two key components of federal government operations. Billions of dollars in federal funds are annually distributed where they are needed as indicated by the Census. In addition, Census figures are relied on by the government as it plans for the physical security of Americans.

In my opinion, achieving the goal we all share at this hearing, a true and precise 2010 Census, depends upon four elements. First, we need a complete and accurate Master Address File (MAF). We cannot count people if we do not know where they live, if we are missing units of habitation. Second, we require minimal coverage error—reducing duplicate enumerations, whereby people are counted in more than one place, and omissions, whereby people are not counted at all. Third, we need a fully and consistently funded American Community Survey (ACS). From an operational perspective, taking the complexities of administering the long form out of the Decennial Census will do much to improve coverage. Fourth, we need to automate field data collection, digital methods for a digital age. The availability of handheld computers is very important for increasing enumerator efficiency and enumeration accuracy. I will review each of these elements in greater detail.

### **Master Address File**

According to studies by the National Academy of Sciences and the Census Bureau itself, there were significant problems with the completeness and accuracy of the MAF in 2000. Essentially, the problems were of three types. One, fast growing areas on the edges of settlement were not adequately captured. Two, there were substantial geocoding and categorization errors of group quarters. Three, and very importantly, many, many housing units in small, multi-unit buildings in urban areas were missed. We learned that reliance on city-style mailing addresses greatly increases the likelihood that units in buildings with a single mail drop-off point are overlooked.

The good news is that the Census Bureau has in place the elements to address these issues. Required is a budget adequate to fund the proper activities, of which there are five, and the administrative will and skill to execute them effectively. The Community Address Updating System (CAUS) is part of the newly implemented American Community Survey and aims, on an ongoing basis, to use ACS field staff to update address and street/road information in areas experiencing major new

development. Our understanding is that CAUS has been successful. Of course, its continued success, its ability to enhance the accuracy of the MAF for 2010, depends on Congress adequately funding the ACS.

In 2005, the Census Bureau provided for public comment a detailed, thoughtful plan to address issues regarding the accuracy of group quarters enumeration, categorization, and geocoding. UMI wrote a letter to OMB in support of the Census Bureau's approach in this regard, and I am submitting this letter for the record.

In 1994, Congress passed important, highly useful legislation, the Census Address List Improvement Act (PL 103-430). This act enabled the creation of a potentially powerful mechanism for improving the MAF, the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) Program. LUCA provides a framework within which local governments can provide updated addresses to the Census Bureau, and so improve the accuracy of the MAF. In its first outing in 2000, LUCA demonstrated its potential, by accounts adding 400-500 thousand addresses that Census would not have otherwise found. However, experience indicates that local government participation in LUCA was not nearly what it might have been. In fact, New York City alone added close to half of the unique new addresses to the MAF. The primary barriers to local participation were lack of staff resources and lack of capacity and training; the smaller the community, the greater these barriers loomed.

Based on lessons learned, LUCA can be a much more effective program, with much higher levels of participation, this time out. To achieve this potential, three elements are necessary. One is the development of an active, cooperative partnership between the Census Bureau and local governments, with a particular focus on adequate training. Two is guidance and active encouragement of smaller governments on using the capacities and resources of higher levels of government, up to and including the states. Third, to have the greatest positive impact on the MAF, LUCA needs to get underway nationwide in late 2007. The window for proper commencement is only a few months in length—too soon, addresses are missed, too late, time is not adequate for local governments to review addresses and for the Census Bureau to incorporate them.

For Census 2000, the Bureau carried out an experimental program for identifying housing units in small multi-unit buildings in urban areas, Update/Enumerate (U/E). Under U/E, Census identifies neighborhoods likely to have numerous buildings without city-style addresses, and dispatches staff to enumerate the building in person. In 2000, the total number of addresses enumerated in U/E areas

rose by 14 percent, a significant figure. Another 31 percent of addresses in U/E areas were corrected and 6 percent of addresses were deleted. Clearly, U/E has significant potential to capture addresses missed by other means. However, to achieve its full potential, U/E needs adequate funding from Congress.

Finally, the Census Bureau should directly utilize state governments as a resource for updating the MAF. State governments maintain detailed administrative records on everything from drivers' licenses to voting records. Our understanding is that the Census Bureau is testing an arrangement with a few states, and if this goes well, the arrangement will be expanded.

In combination, then, CAUS, LUCA, U/E, an improved approach to capturing group quarters, and partnerships with state governments can bring about a far more accurate MAF. As such a MAF is the fundamental prerequisite to a successful Census, I respectfully suggest to this committee that, for its edification, it ask the Census Bureau to report on the Bureau's approach to preparing the MAF for 2010. My hope is that Congress, with full understanding, will provide the resources to allow the Census Bureau to take the steps needed to ensure that all households in America are counted.

### **Coverage Improvement**

According to the coverage evaluation program for Census 2000, there were 9.8 million duplicates and "other residence" erroneous enumerations, and 8.0 million omissions. While the national net error was relatively small, these duplications and omissions were not evenly distributed geographically. For the 2010 Census, everyone agrees, we want coverage errors for states and smaller geographies to be as small as possible.

Recognizing this, the Census Bureau has embarked on a series of efforts to correct the problems that lead to such differences. These efforts include:

- a Decennial Census Short Form Experiment, to test various approaches to wording, instructions and guidance to respondents as to who should and should not be considered part of the household;
- the 2006 Census Test in Travis County, Texas and the Cheyenne River American Indian Reservation, one key aim of which is testing field approaches for reducing coverage error;

- the 2006 Census Test Coverage Followup operation, an effort to test multiple approaches for flagging for enumerator followup households more likely to have coverage problems (e.g., large households); and
- the 2006 Census Coverage Measurement Test, so that Census may accurately measure the rate and type of coverage error.

Additional efforts will be carried out in 2007 and 2008, culminating in the Census Dress Rehearsal in California and North Carolina. UMI strongly supports these Census Bureau efforts to reduce coverage error, and have stated so in letters to the Bureau and OMB. I submit these letters for the record.

### **American Community Survey**

In past censuses, at the same time the Census Bureau was trying to find and count every person, it also had to collect social and economic characteristics from one out of every six households through the “long form.” The long form operation made census taking significantly more difficult and took away from the focus on accurately counting the population. Because of the long form, the Census Bureau had to hire thousands of additional temporary census takers and then spend much of the training budget and time teaching them how to ask the long form questions, rather than concentrating on a better count of the population.

Because the long form adds so much complexity to census taking, with the urging of the Congress, the Census Bureau looked for a way to stop the tail from wagging the dog. Working with the Congress over the last decade, the Census Bureau developed a replacement for the long form – the American Community Survey. The ACS is the long form spread out over the decade and it separates the tasks of counting people from collecting the social and economic characteristics the nation and local areas depend on every day. The ACS, in short, does not disrupt the count of the population like the long form did. Moreover, as the continuous operations of the ACS require a permanent, professional field staff, the ACS will allow the Census Bureau to utilize this staff for the purposes of Census 2010, relying less on temporary workers and enhancing the accuracy of the count. Further, as the ACS includes the CAUS program, ACS funding allows the MAF to be updated on a continual basis.

Clearly, the ACS has enormous value in its own right. It will provide annually updated information vital to the improved effectiveness and cost-efficiency of hundreds of federal programs, and will enable local governments and businesses across the nation to make much more informed decisions regarding the allocation of scarce resources. However, Congress should understand that, if it wishes to have an accurate population count for the purposes of apportionment and redistricting, full and stable funding for the ACS annually is necessary to keep the long form data collection apart from the Decennial Census.

### **Technology**

It is time to apply 21<sup>st</sup> century methods of data collection to the Decennial Census. The use of Hand Held Computers (HHC) could have significant impacts in terms of the quality and cost of data collection. HHC will reduce the number of enumeration and clerical errors. It will offer cost savings—reducing the number of unnecessary non-response follow-up interviews and the amount of labor necessary to process paperwork. Moreover, the HHC will allow enumerators to simultaneously conduct non-response follow-up interviews and the vacant-delete check, eliminating the need for two separate procedures.

In its 2006 Census Test, the Bureau will be testing HHC to determine the appropriate methods and the correct level and type of investment. It could do so because Congress chose to pass the House version of the Census budget in 2005. To reap the benefits of HHC, Census needs adequate funds for obtaining, testing, and training on this technology between now and 2010.

### **Conclusion**

To reiterate, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, an accurate Decennial Census is vital to our democracy, our economy, and our communities. To achieve an accurate Census, four elements are necessary – a complete Master Address File, methods for substantially reducing coverage error, a fully funded ACS, and adequate investment in technology.

These elements require a steady commitment from Congress between now and April 1, 2010, a commitment of resources that will provide an enormous return on investment for the American people. The returns to Congress itself also will be substantial, enabling the apportionment and redistricting of seats that reflect the true population of each state and its communities. Shortchanging

Census preparations because the day of collection is four years away will carry a very high cost in exchange for, in the context of the federal budget, minimal savings.

The importance that Brookings places on a successful 2010 Census is reflected in our decision to host a briefing on the topic for members of Congress and their staff, as well as interested other parties, on April 7, 2006. I wish to express my gratitude to John Cuaderes and his staff, Mr. Chairman, for their strong and continuing support and guidance regarding this effort, as well as our effort last fall in educating appropriations subcommittee members in both Houses about the impacts of proposed Census budget cuts.

On behalf of UMI and the Brookings Institution, I thank you Mr. Chairman and Members of this Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide observations on Census 2010. I am pleased to answer any questions you might have.