

Arturo Vargas  
Executive Director of the NALEO Educational Fund and  
Co-Chair of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights Census Task Force  
U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science  
Outside Witness Testimony

**Public Witness Testimony by Arturo Vargas, Executive Director of  
The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO)  
Educational Fund and Co-Chair of The Leadership Conference on Civil and  
Human Rights Census Task Force  
Before the United States House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce,  
Justice, Science, and Related Agencies  
March 22, 2012**

Chairman Wolf, Ranking Member Fattah, and members of the Subcommittee:

I am Arturo Vargas, the Executive Director of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund. I also serve as Co-Chair of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights Census Task Force, which brings together leading civic and civil rights organizations to address pressing Census issues. Thank you for the invitation to appear before you today on behalf of the NALEO Educational Fund and The Leadership Conference Census Taskforce to support the President's Fiscal Year 2013 (FY 2013) request to Congress of \$970.4 million in discretionary funding for the U.S. Census Bureau.

The NALEO Educational Fund is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that facilitates full Latino participation in the American political process, from citizenship to public service. Our constituency includes the more than 6,000 Latino elected and appointed officials nationwide. Our Board members and constituency include Republicans, Democrats and Independents.

The NALEO Education Fund is one of the nation's leading organizations in the area of Census policy development and public education, and we are deeply committed to ensuring that the Census Bureau provides our nation with the most accurate count of its population. Since 2000, the NALEO Educational Fund has served on the Secretary of Commerce's 2010 Census Advisory Committee, or its predecessor, the Decennial Census Advisory Committee, and we actively participated in the Committee's discussions surrounding the planning for the 2010 enumeration. We also served on the Joint Advisory Advertising Review Panel (JAARP), which the Census Bureau created to review its advertising and communications efforts. In addition, the NALEO Educational Fund was actively involved in outreach to the Latino community for the decennial enumerations in 1990, 2000 and 2010. In October 2009, we launched the "ya es hora, ¡HAGASE CONTAR! (Make Yourself Count!)" campaign, which focused on promoting the importance of the Census, educating individuals about filling out their Census forms, and encouraging households to mail back their responses.

The Leadership Conference is ideally positioned to address many of the most pressing issues affecting the successful implementation of Census Bureau programs, surveys, and initiatives. The Leadership Conference's coordinating role among so many diverse organizations allows for the sharing of different perspectives, as well as the development of broader strategies that occur within the purview of any individual organization. All of its work draws on the expertise of the

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cross-section of national organizations, and examines the impact of civil rights policy on a broad range of constituencies.

The Leadership Conference considers a fair and accurate census and comprehensive ACS among the most significant civil rights issues facing the country today. Its wide-ranging efforts to promote equality of representation and economic opportunity are guided significantly by objective, inclusive data on America's diverse communities and populations. The Leadership Conference and member organizations such as the NALEO Educational Fund appreciate the importance of fact-based analyses for identifying disparate access and outcomes and devising effective solutions.

Mr. Chairman, as your committee prepares to consider the FY 2013 Commerce, Justice, and Science (CJS) Appropriations bill, we urge your support for the Administration's FY 2013 request to Congress for the Census Bureau. We believe this amount is the minimum necessary to preserve core statistical programs and ensure the continued reliability of data vital for public, private, and nonprofit sector decision-making now and in the future. In particular, reliable and accurate data about the Latino community are critical for the prosperity and well-being of the entire country. The results of the 2010 Census demonstrated the importance of the decennial enumeration for charting the dramatic growth of our nation's Latino community and the implications of that growth for the future of our economy and democracy. The Latino population in the United States was 50.5 million in 2010, and Latinos are the nation's second largest and fastest growing population group. Between 2000 and 2010, the Latino share of the population increased from 12.5% (one in eight Americans) to 16.3% (one in six Americans).

For FY 2013, the President proposed a total budget of \$970.4 million in discretionary funding for the Census Bureau, a 3 percent increase over the Fiscal Year 2012 funding level of \$942 million. In this testimony, I will address how the Administration's request is necessary to maintain the reliability of ACS data, begin planning for a cost-effective 2020 decennial census, and effectively meet the constitutional responsibilities of the Bureau. I would like to start by providing detailed information about the President's request regarding two critical programs: the American Community Survey (ACS), and the planning for the 2020 Census.

**American Community Survey:** For FY 2013, the President requested \$252.7 million, which represents a decrease of \$10.9 million for the ACS program. The ACS is implementing several changes in FY 2013, including an Internet response option and a reduction in the scale of the Failed Edit Follow-up Operation.

We believe the FY 2013 budget request sufficiently invests in the ACS program to ensure that the sample size is large enough to produce reliable and useful data for less populated geographic areas, such as towns and rural counties, and especially less populous subgroups. This funding also would allow for improved telephone and field data collection; sufficient follow-up of unresponsive households in remote areas; and a comprehensive review of three-year and five-year ACS estimates. These activities are imperative for ensuring the ACS can continue to

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provide valid data about the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the American people on an ongoing, annual basis.

Policymakers at all levels of government rely on ACS data to make important decisions that affect the lives of all Americans. These data help make such determinations as the number of teachers that are needed in classrooms, the best places to build roads and highways, and the best way to provide health and public safety services to our neighborhoods and communities.

According to a July 2010 report by Andrew Reamer of the Brookings Institute which analyzed FY 2008 federal government spending, 184 federal domestic assistance programs used ACS-related datasets to help guide the distribution of \$416 billion, 29 percent of all federal assistance. ACS-guided grants accounted for \$389.2 billion, 69 percent of all federal grant funding. Most of ACS-guided federal assistance goes to state governments through a few large grant programs which support highway infrastructure and aid low-income households. The ten largest ACS-guided assistance programs include several that help ensure that Latino families and their children receive quality health care, and housing, including Medicaid, Section 8 housing programs, and school education grants.

Other federal programs also rely on the ACS for implementation of the programs and priorities of the federal government. For example, the Department of Defense uses ACS data for the implementation of the procurement technical assistance it provides to businesses. The Department of Agriculture uses the data for water and waste disposal system planning in rural communities, where a significant number of Latino families live.

In addition, sound implementation of the protections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 relies on ACS data, because those data are used to make determinations under section 203, which requires jurisdictions with a high percentage of people who are not yet English language proficient to offer language assistance to citizens during the electoral process.

High-quality, objective, and universal ACS data are also critical for our nation's private sector. Without these data, businesses and non-profit organizations will lose the ability to understand their customers and the communities they serve, and allocate their fiscal and human resources prudently. American companies rely on ACS data every day to make vital decisions about where to locate and expand; what goods and services to offer; the scope of employee training needed; and long term investment opportunities. Thus, FY 2013 funding to support reliable ACS data is critical for sound government and business profitability, and the pursuit of national economic prosperity.

**2020 Census:** As 2010 Census activities wind down with final evaluations and data products, planning for the next decennial enumeration is on its cyclical upswing. The President's FY 2013 request for 2020 Census activities is nearly double the FY2012 funding level, from \$66.7 million in FY 2012 to \$131.4 million in FY 2013. We strongly support this important funding increase. As the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has consistently documented, reasonable

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investments in census planning in the early part of the decade will help save millions, and perhaps billions, of dollars in census costs down the road.

We know from experience that insufficient funding for early decennial census planning leads to ballooning costs later in the decade. The Census Bureau must invest resources early in the decade to ensure cost-effective, successful implementation of census operations in the future. The pace of technological change and rapid evolution of communication modes make ongoing research and testing essential. Similarly, keeping up with changes in the nation's housing stock and roads could save hundreds of millions of dollars during census preparations in 2018-19, allowing the Bureau to confine final address checking to areas in frequent transition. As Director Groves has stated, the vision is, "An efficient and quality census that counts people once, only once, and in the right place." The FY 2013 budget also supports another critical Bureau central focus of the 2020 Census planning: To design programs and operations for the 2020 Census that have residual benefits for other Census Bureau data collections.

In this spirit, we are working with the Census Bureau to continue a robust Partnership Program in preparation for the 2020 Census. During the decennial enumeration, the Census Bureau used the Partnership Program to engage community-based organizations, religious leaders, educators, local businesses, and media outlets who had strong relationships with hard-to-count populations and were familiar with the barriers they face in Census participation. The Bureau utilized the assistance of Partnership Program stakeholders in educating residents about the importance of returning their Census questionnaires, and helping them surmount the barriers in completing and returning their forms. In short, the Partnership Program ensured that timely and locally relevant information from the Bureau reached community leaders, and that local enumeration efforts were able to use limited resources efficiently. We believe that the program, which proved to be an integral component of the Census 2010 outreach efforts, remains critical for reaching hard-to-count populations and ensuring their participation in future surveys and censuses. However, the severe limitations being placed on the Bureau's budget have proven to be an impediment to guaranteeing that this important initiative will continue. The President's FY 2013 budget request may allow for the resumption of this critical program.

Support for the full amount of Census funding in the President's 2013 budget is particularly crucial in light of past experiences with Census expenditure reductions in post-enumeration years. Unfortunately, Congress has often turned to the Census Bureau's budget as a source of expendable funds after each decennial census, overlooking the important work the agency does year in and year out and starving the critical research and testing phases of the next enumeration. The FY 2012 budget was no exception.

In FY 2012, this subcommittee recommended \$855.4 million to fund the Census Bureau's activities, which was 25 percent below the Bureau's FY 2011 spending level. In contrast, the Senate FY 2012 CJS Appropriations bill provided approximately \$88 million more than the House version of this bill. Fortunately, the final appropriation legislation offered just enough funding for the Bureau to proceed with its core activities. The so-called "mini-bus"

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appropriations bill — encompassing three of 12 federal appropriations accounts, including the CJS Appropriations bill — allocated \$942 million for the Census Bureau. However, we strongly caution against relying on money from the Working Capital Fund to pay for ongoing core activities.

As a result of FY 2012 and FY 2011 budget cuts – and on its own accord - the Census Bureau has committed to reducing costs by taking bold steps to streamline operations. In FY 2012, it realigned its national field office structure by permanently closing six regional offices. Last year, the Bureau eliminated a number of lower priority programs. In addition, the Bureau has demonstrated its determination to make modest investments in required activities to help save billions of dollars.

We understand the fiscal environment requires Congress to make difficult decisions and curtail current spending. We recognize that there are many worthy programs funded through the CJS Appropriations bill. Yet, we believe that making cuts in the President's FY 2013 budget request for the Census Bureau will be counterproductive to an agency whose data are essential to running our government, informing our policies, and influencing economic productivity. Supporting the full level of the President's FY 2013 budget request is a wise and necessary investment in the effective governance of our nation and preservation of our democratic ideals.

The NALEO Educational Fund and The Leadership Conference remain committed to being an active and thoughtful partner to this Subcommittee, Congress, the White House and the Census Bureau, in ensuring the success of the ACS, the 2020 Census and other initiatives under the Bureau's jurisdiction.

I thank the Chairman, the Ranking Member, and the Subcommittee once again for providing us with the opportunity to share our views today in support of the President's FY 2013 budget request for the Census Bureau.