



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. Census Bureau

Washington, DC 20233-0001
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

Mr. Brian Harris-Kojetin
Senior Statistician, Statistical and Science Policy Branch
Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs
Office of Management and Budget
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Mr. Harris-Kojetin:

The U.S. Census Bureau requests your assistance and cooperation in submitting to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) the enclosed request for emergency clearance of an information collection request to conduct the American Community Survey (ACS) Methods Panel Envelope Mandatory Messaging test. We are requesting OMB conclude its review as soon as possible, but no later than April 24, 2015.

The ACS collects detailed socioeconomic data from about 3.5 million households in the United States and 36,000 in Puerto Rico each year. The ACS also collects detailed socioeconomic data from about 195,000 residents living in Group Quarter (GQ) facilities. An ongoing data collection effort with an annual sample of this magnitude requires that the ACS continue research, testing and evaluations aimed at improving data quality, achieving survey cost efficiencies, and improving ACS questionnaire content and related data collection materials. The ACS Methods Panel is a research program that is designed to address and respond to issues and survey needs. One of those issues relates to respondent concerns about the tone of the mandatory message on the ACS mail materials.

The outside of the envelopes that contain the instructions to respond online and the paper ACS questionnaire display the bold message, "YOUR RESPONSE IS REQUIRED BY LAW." The prominent references to the mandatory participation in the ACS are concerning to many respondents. The Census Bureau developed the current presentation of the mandatory nature of participation based on previous research that identified a significant positive impact of these messages in encouraging high self-response rates and reducing the need for follow-up by phone or personal visits by Census Bureau interviewers.

In order to be responsive to respondent concern with the prominence of the mandatory message on the envelopes, we are conducting the Envelope Mandatory Messaging Test.

This test will measure the impact of removing the phrase "YOUR RESPONSE IS REQUIRED BY LAW" from the envelopes (Attachment C) used to mail the initial package (second mailing) as well as the replacement package (fourth mailing). This phrase does not appear on other envelopes. The Envelope Mandatory Messaging Test will provide response information that will allow the Census Bureau to measure the effects on response, data quality, and cost impact to the ACS program of removing the mandatory message from the envelopes. We will continue to examine other possible revisions to the presentation in respondent materials of the mandatory nature of participation in the ACS, and will make future recommendations for additional testing.

Mr. Brian Harris-Kojetin

2

In order to be responsive to these respondent concerns in a timely manner and expedite the implementation of this test, we are seeking approval to conduct this test under the emergency review process, and are requesting that OMB waive the requirement to provide a pre-submission notice in the *Federal Register*.

We request that your office expedite review and approve of this request. Given that the planned date for mailing the first envelopes with the revised messages is April 27, 2015, we are seeking approval from OMB for the Envelope Mandatory Messaging test by April 24, 2015. If you have any questions or need more information regarding this request, contact Mr. James B. Treat, Chief, American Community Survey Office, (301) 763-3609.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John H. Thompson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John H. Thompson
Director

Enclosure