

May 23, 2007

The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan
Chairman
House Commerce, Justice, Science and Related
Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee
Room H-310, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski
Chairman
Senate Commerce, Justice, Science and Related
Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee
144 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Mollohan and Mikulski,

We are writing to thank you for fully funding the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) in FY 2007, and to encourage you to maintain funding for the SIPP until a demonstrably better survey can be developed, tested, and a careful transition can be made from one to the other.

The SIPP provides unique and important data on household income dynamics, program eligibility, program participation, composition changes, economic and material well-being. We understand that the Census Bureau plans to replace the SIPP with a less costly survey, the Dynamics of Economic Well-Being System (DEWS), as part of its ongoing efforts to improve survey quality and make better use of taxpayer dollars. However, it is important that the new survey methodology be adequately tested to ensure that it produces useful and reliable data. In addition, we are concerned that data from the proposed DEWS system may not be comparable with the data previously gathered by SIPP, rendering it impossible to track a variety of changes over time. While we appreciate the speed with which the Bureau has worked to develop DEWS, shifting to an untested survey with no proven comparability to SIPP data strikes us as problematic and unwise. We would prefer to see the DEWS field tested so that its superiority to the SIPP can be demonstrated, and a period where the surveys are run simultaneously, so that researchers can determine their comparability, even at the cost of a modest hiatus in data collection between surveys.

For these reasons, we ask that you maintain funding the Survey of Income and Program Participation unless and until the methods to be used by DEWS have been fully tested and it has been established that DEWS can provide data on income dynamics and related topics that are as good in quality or better than the data currently produced by SIPP. We request that the Census Bureau be allocated \$61.7 million in FY 2008 in order to field the last wave of the 2004 SIPP panel with half the sample size and no topical modules, and to start a 2008 SIPP panel with twelve waves, a full sample of 45,700 and topical modules. If a field tested study shows that a transition to DEWS is warranted, we ask that Congress provide funding for a "bridge" period of overlap between SIPP and DEWS so the two data systems may be compared with one another, and so trends may be reliably tracked over time, before and after the transition.

Sincerely,

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SIPP Researcher Letter to Congress

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