

November 26, 2012

Robert M Groves
Director, U.S. Bureau of the Census
4600 Silver Hill Road
Washington, DC 20233

Dear Director Groves,

The Society for Linguistic Anthropology is concerned about recent efforts to dismantle the American Community Survey (ACS); we ask you to make our concerns known to legislators so that funding is restored. As you know, the ACS provides the only reliable data on language in the U.S., along with many other critical measures of the nation's households which the decennial Census no longer covers in its short form. The results of the survey are needed to comply with Congressional mandates, such as the implementation of the Voting Rights act, and to enable the essential efforts of educators, law enforcement, and health and social service personnel on behalf of those who do not speak English as their primary language. The ACS is crucial also to the efforts of researchers who use language data to support a variety of important interventions and programs for all children and communities across the U.S. In particular, the SLA fears that without the required annual survey, which includes three questions devoted to language ((1) Do you speak a language other than English?, (2) If so, which language [fill in], (3) How well do you speak English?), it will not be possible to chart the number and type of languages spoken in US households or the location and size of communities that need support for students, patients, voters, and consumers who speak English as a second language.

Moreover, because fiscal funding for state and local educational and health services is based on ACS results, it is imperative that the ACS not be made voluntary, as a House amendment suggests; such a purportedly cost-saving approach will produce incomplete and incorrect data, and prohibitive expenses will be incurred to correct the records.

As anthropologists, our primary obligation is the welfare of the people with whom we work, and as linguists we understand the critical role that language plays in the lives of all people. As US linguistic anthropologists we want to make clear to our elected officials that the data collected by the ACS on language and other aspects of life in the USA are necessary in order for the government to meet its obligations to its citizens; for this reason we urge a restoration of funding for the annual survey.

We welcome the opportunity to add our petition to those of the many individuals and organizations that are concerned about helping you honor your commitment to securing

accurate data on the population of the United States; please let us know how else we may be of service.

Yours truly,

SLA

CC: Anthony G Tersine Jr (Assistant Chief, American Community Survey)

_____ (Director & Assistant Chief , House Committee on Energy and Commerce)

_____ (Director & Assistant Chief, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and
Transportation)