



May 29, 2014

Dear Honorable Member of Congress,

On behalf of the Marketing Research Association (MRA), I urge you to oppose any amendments that would adversely impact the American Community Survey (ACS) during floor debate today on the Fiscal Year 2015 Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) Appropriations bill. So far, we expect Rep. Poe to re-offer his amendment to make the ACS voluntary.

A voluntary ACS will make the survey dramatically more expensive (at least \$60-100 million more per year), more intrusive (more phone calls and door-knocking to try to build up the sample), and less representative (rural areas and small towns of less than 20,000 people will not be counted). ACS data is used to allocate more than \$415 billion a year in federal assistance (more than 2/3 of all federal grant funding). Without that data, funding would be determined by the whims of federal bureaucrats, or the political needs of the White House.

The American Community Survey (ACS) is a rolling survey sent to 3.5 million addresses every year. This mandatory-response survey gets a 95 to 98% response rate, capturing demographics and socio-economic indicators in tiny geographic areas across the country, making it possible to accurately compare downtown New York with rural Kentucky. No other survey in the country can do the job – if they could, MRA members (survey, opinion and marketing researchers) would be doing the work, instead of relying on the ACS data to calibrate their own surveys to ensure statistically representative samples. **[There is no substitute for the ACS.](#)**

If the ACS is made voluntary, the response rate will plummet (evidence provided by Census studies and by the example of such a move recently in Canada). Private sector (voluntary) survey response rates rarely top ten percent these days. That is why a voluntary ACS won't produce usable data on much of the country.

Making the ACS voluntary will also dramatically increase costs, since the Census Bureau must devote more time and money to secure respondent cooperation through telephone and door-to-door interviewing (both more costly than responses received through the mail or online) and try to achieve statistical reliability for small area/population estimates.

Conservatives support a mandatory ACS, evidenced in this [National Review editorial](#) and [George Will column](#). Businesses rely on the ACS, too, as explained by this [local Chamber of Commerce op-ed](#).

Please oppose the Poe amendment, and any others that would impair the ACS. MRA stands ready to assist you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Howard Fienberg', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Howard Fienberg, PLC  
Director of Government Affairs  
Marketing Research Association (MRA)