

### Analysis of 2016 Appropriations to Statistical Agencies

Overall, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016 demonstrates a relatively good appreciation for the federal government's role in providing accurate, objective, scientifically reliable and representative statistics as critical public goods. With one exceptions (the National Agricultural Statistics Service) officially designated statistical agencies (see table, below) received funding equal to or greater than that with which they operated in fiscal year (FY) 2015. Due to inflation in survey collection and other costs, and required, current investments in future surveys, this does not necessarily mean that agencies' funding is sufficient to maintain all programs. No agency received the amount that the Obama Administration deemed necessary to maintain current programs and initiate needed new initiatives. Following is an agency-by-agency review of FY 2016 appropriations.

**Census Bureau** -- The Act includes \$1.37 billion for the Bureau of the Census, including transfer of funds. It specifies includes \$270,000,000 for the Current Surveys and Programs account of the Bureau and 1.1 billion for its Periodic Censuses and Programs account. The Bureau is directed to prioritize increases in spending on activities that have the greatest potential to reduce cost and risk for the 2020 Census, as well as activities to reduce survey respondent burden.

Although this appropriation is \$130 million below the President's budget request of \$1.5 billion, it is well above the levels earlier approved by the House and Senate. Further, it does *not* include language that would have made response to the American Community Survey voluntary.

At issue is how the Census Bureau will achieve the investment in the 2020 Decennial Census that Congress directs when the appropriation for periodic censuses is \$122 million below the amount specified as necessary by the President's request as necessary for periodic Censuses, and given the need to invest this year in the 2017 Economic Census. The Bureau may again have to shift some funding from other programs in order to shore up for the 2020 Decennial.

**Bureau of Economic Analysis** – The Act includes \$105 million for BEA, an amount that will cover the costs of the agency's relocation to Census Bureau facilities without reducing funds for its current programs.

**Bureau of Justice Statistics** – The Act includes \$41 million specifically for the Bureau of Justice Statistics, an amount that is equal to 2015 appropriations but \$20 million below the amount requested by the President. This could mean that BJS initiatives on enhancement of the National Crime Victims Survey, a National Survey of Public Defenders and investigation of special topics such a recidivism are not undertaken in 2016.

**Bureau of Labor Statistics** – The Act provides \$609 million for operations of the BLS, an amount that is \$17 million above FY 2015 appropriations but \$24 million below the amount necessary for the agency to restore programs and activities suspended in FY 2014 and 2015 and improve its Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) and Working Conditions programs. It is thus expected that the BLS will either have to retain current program suspensions and/or cut an existing program or programs.

**Bureau of Transportation Statistics** – BTS is funded out of the Highway Trust Fund that was renewed in the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST) that passed December 4, 2015. The FAST Act keeps BLS funding at \$26 million for FY's 2016-2020, the same level at which it has been funded for the last 3 years. Thus, the agency's purchasing power will continue to decrease despite the fact that the Act also mandates initiation of a new Port Performance Freight Statistics Program.

An important provision of the FAST Act specifies that, despite BTS's relocation to a policy-related office, the agency will have complete autonomy over its collection and analysis activities and does not require approval for the publication of statistics. Unfortunately, such autonomy does not extend to the management of its appropriated funding or its decisions about how to maintain the security of confidential information.

**Energy Information Administration** -- The Act provides \$122 million for the Energy Information Administration, an amount that is \$5 million above FY 2015 but \$9 million less than that specified in the President's request. The agency will thus have to choose from among the initiatives specified in the President's budget which one(s) it can carry out.

**Economic Research Service** – ERS is flat-funded at \$85 million for 2016. While this permits the agency to continue covering the rent and security costs transferred to it from other agencies while maintaining core programs, it is unlikely that ERS can undertake any major new activities.

**National Agricultural Statistics Service** -- The Act provides \$168 million for NASS, including up to \$42 million for the Census of Agriculture. The total amount is 4 million less than the agency's FY 2015 appropriation and \$12 million less than the president's request. Nevertheless, NASS is directed to spend \$500,000 for pollinator surveys, \$957,000 for the Chemical Use Program, and \$335,000 for employee health benefits as requested in the President's budget. Additionally, NASS is directed to reinstate a vineyard production survey. The unfunded mandates may require a transfer of funds from some current programs.

**National Center for Education Statistics** – The Act provides \$112 for NCES programs, an amount that is \$9 million above FY 2015 appropriations but \$13 million less than requested by the President's budget. The agency will thus have to choose from among the initiatives specified in the President's budget which one(s) it can carry out.

**National Center for Health Statistics** -- The Act provides \$160 million to NCHS in FY16, which is \$5 million more than in FY 2015 but excludes \$12 million in funding for the mandatory Prevention and Public Health Fund that was included in the President's request. According to the Friends of NCHS, this level will allow the agency to maintain its critical activities and will support States in their continued implementation of electronic death registration systems (EDRS) to enhance the timeliness and quality of death data used both in public health and in fraud prevention.

**National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics**, at \$58.5 million for FY 2016, is virtually flat funded from FY 2015, and is \$3.5 million below what was requested in the President's Budget. The agency may not be able to fill the data gaps its proposed initiatives indicated.

**Office of Research, Evaluation and Statistics** of the Social Security Administration. The Act provides \$25.9 million for 2016, which is an 11-percent cut from FY 2015. This small but important Office got the largest decrease in year-over-year funds of any statistical agency.

**The Statistics of Income (SOI)** unit of the Internal Revenue Service got appropriations of \$37.9 million, an increase of 3.6-percent over FY 2015. The small increase is unlikely to meet growing demand for research collaboration with SOI.

*For details on the various appropriations, see the text of the legislation and all appropriations tables at: <https://rules.house.gov/bill/114/hr-2029-sa>*

*For a great tabular review of appropriations since 2012 see Steve Pierson's chart at <http://magazine.amstat.org/blog/2016/02/01/finalfy16/>*