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MEMORANDUM FOR CLEARANCE OFFICERS AT FEDERAL AGENCIES

FROM: Neomi Rao 
Administrator
Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs

SUBJECT: Minimizing Household Surveys during the 2020 Census of Population and Housing

To encourage respondent cooperation with the 2020 Census of Population and Housing (Census) and consistent with longstanding past practice, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is adopting the general policy of prioritizing the accuracy of the Census¹ by reducing the issuance of new Federal agency-sponsored household surveys during the Census response period—March 1, 2020, through August 30, 2020. New requests to complete government questionnaires during the Census period add to respondent fatigue. Implementing OMB's general policy will prevent such respondent fatigue, making it more likely respondents will provide complete and accurate responses to the Census.

OMB will implement this prioritization through its review and coordination responsibilities under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA) 44 U.S.C § 3501 *et seq.*² For past Census response periods in 1990, 2000, and 2010, agency requests for new household surveys that proposed initiating data collection during the Census response period were approved by OMB only when the agency demonstrated an urgent need to obtain information or demonstrated that the information sought could not be collected prior to or following the Census response period. OMB plans to continue this prioritization generally. If an agency seeks an exception to this practice, the agency should provide a detailed justification for any request for a new household survey for which the agency proposes to initiate data collection during the Census response period. This policy applies only to new household surveys and will not result in interruptions of continuing or cyclical surveys.

Thank you for your cooperation.

¹ Mandated by Art. I, § 2 of the Constitution, the Census “fulfills many and valuable functions,” including providing a basis for reapportioning representatives among the States in Congress, the allocation of Federal grants, the administration of public programs, and the collection of important data for the public and private sectors. *See* *Baldrige v. Shapiro*, 455 U.S. 345, 353 (1982). Given these functions, it is critical to promote the accuracy of the Census.

² The PRA directs OMB to “minimize the Federal information collection burden, with particular emphasis on those individuals and entities most adversely affected” as well as to “maximize the practical utility of and public benefit from information collected by or for the Federal Government.” 44 U.S.C. § 3504(c)(3)-(4). Given the significant practical utility and public benefit of an accurate Census, prioritizing the Census over other surveys through OMB's review functions helps advance Congress's statutory direction in the PRA.