



Prepared Statement for the Record

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Census Data: Special Issues Related to the U.S. Territories

Before the Information Policy, Census, and National Archives Subcommittee
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the
Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Insular Affairs

May 21, 2008

Mr. Chairman, Madam Chairwoman and distinguished subcommittee members, thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments for the record. The Puerto Rico Institute of Statistics is charged with the responsibility of ensuring universal and timely access to reliable and complete statistical information on Puerto Rico. As such, our institution endorses the extension of federal statistical programs to Puerto Rico and the insular areas.

We recognize that the unavailability of current and reliable data of Puerto Rico and the insular areas is a complex issue, in some instances involving several federal agencies in multiple roles. It is important to keep track of these roles in analyzing the problem and in proposing solutions. For instance, some federal agencies sponsor federal statistical programs by separating funds in their budgets for this purpose. However, this need not mean that they engage in conducting the statistical programs. In this case, the statistical programs may be conducted by other federal agencies. In fact, the U.S. Bureau of the Census ("USBOC") in many instances takes on this role on a reimbursable basis, where the sponsoring agency foots the bill.

We would like to begin by noting that the unavailability of current and reliable data of Puerto Rico and the insular areas is not limited to statistical programs conducted by the USBOC. Statistical programs undertaken by other federal agencies also contribute to this unavailability. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services carries out the *National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey*, which provides estimates on the number of persons in each state subject to risk factors, such as environmental exposure, and suffering from certain diseases. As a result, policymakers in Puerto Rico lack critical information necessary to monitor trends in the prevalence, awareness, treatment, and control of diseases.

On the other hand, the USBOC does sponsor and conduct several well-known statistical programs in Puerto Rico, including the *decennial Household Census*, the *Economic Census* and the *American Community Survey*. Nevertheless, for many other statistical programs conducted by the USBOC, no information collection takes place in Puerto Rico and the insular areas, potentially reflecting that the sponsoring agency does not consider these areas as priorities for funding. For instance, the *Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Tabulation* is conducted by the USBOC, but sponsored by several federal agencies, including the Department of Justice, the Department of Labor, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the Office of Personnel Management. The EEO Tabulation serves as the primary external benchmark for workplace discrimination laws in each state. As such, anti-discrimination lawsuits are hindered in Puerto Rico due to the unavailability of data from the EEO Tabulation. Furthermore, by providing estimates for each state, this statistical program provides state policymakers an important source of information, which is denied to Puerto Rico and the insular areas.

Several other statistical programs conducted by the USBOC are in the same situation. For instance, the *Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS)* and the *Private School Survey (PSS)* are conducted by the USBOC, but sponsored by the Department of Education and they provide state-level estimates, except for Puerto Rico and the insular areas. The SASS is one of the most complete sources of information for the major components of any education system, such as schools, principals, teachers, and students. The SASS enables an examination of the relationships among these elements of the education system, a fundamental feature that needs to be taken into consideration for the appropriate design of

education policies. The PSS, on the other hand, provides comparable private school data.

The *National Prisoner Statistics (NPS) Program* and the *Survey of Inmates of Local Jails (SILJ)* are conducted by the USBOC, but sponsored by the Department of Justice. NPS Programs and the SILJ produce estimates disaggregated by state, except for Puerto Rico and the insular areas. The NPS is one of the primary sources of information on adults incarcerated in state and federal correctional institutions, including their characteristics, movements, and history. The SILJ provides detailed information on the criminal histories of jail inmates, their recent offenses and sentences, their socioeconomic and family backgrounds, their use of drugs and alcohol, and their activities and the health care they receive while confined.

The *Current Population Survey (CPS)* is conducted by the USBOC, but sponsored by the Department of Labor. It provides estimates for each state, except Puerto Rico and the insular areas. The CPS generates lots of attention, because of its implication in terms of the allocation of federal funds for programs such as those through the Job Training Partnership Act.

As a result, it is important Congressional action be directed not only towards the USBOC, but also towards other federal agencies whose sponsorship of federal statistical programs does not extend to Puerto Rico and the insular areas, generating an important information gap for the design of both state and federal policies.

Moreover, it is worthwhile to mention that there are statistical programs that are both sponsored and conducted by the USBOC and can be used to estimate state-level information, except for Puerto Rico and the insular areas. One example is the *Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)*. It is one of the principal sources of information on health insurance coverage, poverty and the effectiveness of existing federal, state, and local welfare programs.

Mr. Chairman and Madam Chairwoman, data users in Puerto Rico and the insular areas, whether they be policymakers, businesses, academics or others, need to

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access statistical information to the same extent as their stateside counterparts. As such, we urge Congress to guarantee federal agencies sponsor the undertaking of their respective surveys in Puerto Rico and the insular areas.

We hope the Subcommittees on Insular Affairs and on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives find this information useful and that they be taken into consideration when designing plans to address the concerns raised in this joint hearing. Thank you.