



CONSORTIUM *of* SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

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November 8, 2016

The Honorable Richard Shelby, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski, Vice Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Culberson, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science  
House Appropriations Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Honda, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science  
House Appropriations Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Shelby, Vice Chairwoman Mikulski, Chairman Culberson and Ranking Member Honda:

As you work to finalize the fiscal year (FY) 2017 Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) appropriations bill, I write to thank you for your longstanding commitment to the U.S. scientific research enterprise and urge you to support the highest possible funding levels for the **National Science Foundation, National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, and Census Bureau** for FY 2017.

The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) is a nonprofit national organization serving as a united voice for more than 100 professional associations, scientific societies, research centers and institutes, and colleges and universities who care about a robust social and behavioral science research enterprise. We represent the collective science policy interests of all fields of social and behavioral science research, including sustained funding for federal agencies that support our science.

Social and behavioral science research is supported across the federal government, including at the National Science Foundation and the Department of Justice. Further, federal statistics collected by the Census Bureau and other federal statistical agencies provide important data needed to conduct social science research that informs policy decisions. Social and behavioral science research provides an evidence base that policy makers can use to produce science-backed strategies for addressing issues of national importance, such as crime prevention, health care for the underserved, or early childhood education. In short, social and behavioral science research makes meaningful contributions across the federal government and to the citizens of this country.

## **National Science Foundation**

Despite the ongoing fiscal challenges, your Subcommittees have remained vigilant in ensuring adequate funding for basic research, particularly at the National Science Foundation. The social and behavioral

science community appreciates your leadership in this regard. Sensitive to the difficult tradeoffs before you, we urge you to appropriate **at least \$7.564 billion for NSF in FY 2017**, the amount of discretionary funding requested by the agency. While we are in full agreement with the broader scientific community that NSF desperately needs a more robust budget in order to put the agency back on a growth trajectory (and recover some of the purchasing power lost in recent years due to sequestration and caps on discretionary spending), we also appreciate the fiscal limitations you are under. We are hopeful that a modest (1.3%) increase in FY 2017 can come close to preserving funding for NSF core programs.

As you know, NSF supports about a quarter of all federally-funded basic scientific research conducted at colleges and universities nationwide. Most notably, NSF serves as the largest single funder of university-based basic social and behavioral science research. While the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorate (SBE) represents only about 3.6 percent of the entire NSF research budget, it supports more than two-thirds (67%) of total federal funding for academic basic research in the social and behavioral sciences. This modest amount of funding has major positive impacts on researchers at universities in your home states and districts.

The reality of years of near-flat funding is bleak. NSF estimates that nearly \$4 billion worth (or more than half of the entire NSF annual budget) of projects that are reviewed as “very good” to “excellent” are left on the cutting room floor each year due to inadequate funding. Simply put, there are far more exciting, potentially transformative research ideas than there is funding. Given that we have no way of knowing where or when the next scientific breakthrough will emerge, it is disheartening to see so many worthy projects go unsupported.

We also don’t know which scientific discipline or multi-disciplinary fields will birth the next innovation or life-changing finding. Therefore, it is critically important that NSF maintain its support for all fields of science and that no single directorate or discipline be arbitrarily singled out for cuts. COSSA strongly urges you to **maintain current practice of appropriating funds to the Research & Related Activities account, leaving NSF with the flexibility to fund the most promising science across all fields.** By funding innovative, cutting-edge research across all disciplines—as NSF has done since its founding—the U.S. is not betting on a single area of science to produce the next paradigm-altering finding. Instead, we are making investments that allow us to simultaneously uncover breakthroughs on all possible fronts, because we understand that it is impossible to predict where the path of basic research will lead us, other than forward. We as a country appreciate that the nature of basic science is to explore fundamental questions that may not have an immediate application, but that contribute to the scaffolding of knowledge that builds and progresses over time. Please do what you can to ensure that those best suited are provided the authority to direct precious federal dollars to the most promising scientific ideas.

## **National Institute of Justice & Bureau of Justice Statistics**

COSSA urges Congress to adopt the House-reported levels of **\$48 million for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and \$40 million for the National Institute of Justice (NIJ)**. NIJ serves as the research arm of the Department of Justice, playing a critical role in helping the agency understand and implement science-based strategies for crime prevention, especially at the state and local level. It supports rigorous social science research that can be disseminated to criminal justice professionals to keep communities safe and prevent and reduce crime.

As one of 13 principal federal statistical agencies, BJS produces data that provides statistical evidence needed by researchers and criminal justice policy decision makers. Taken together with NIJ, these

investments represent the only dedicated sources of federal research support committed to enhancing our understanding of crime and the criminal justice system, including topics like victimization, law enforcement, recidivism and reentry, drugs and crime, and tribal justice.

What is more, demand from policymakers and criminal justice practitioners for rigorous, objective research on policing, mental health, sentencing reform, and other timely topics has increased to unprecedented levels. Unfortunately, neither BJS nor NIJ have received meaningful increases in several years, significantly limiting their capacities to meet the demand. We urge adoption of the House-proposed levels for BJS and NIJ as an important first step toward providing the resources that are sorely needed.

## **Census Bureau**

**COSSA urges the Committee to appropriate \$1.634 billion to the U.S. Census Bureau in FY 2017**, including \$778 million for the 2020 Census and \$251 million for the American Community Survey. While this amount is higher than both the House and Senate proposals, the need is well-documented. Funding Census below this amount would jeopardize implementation of a modern, cost-effective, and accurate 2020 Census. The agency simply cannot meet Congress' directive of achieving a 2020 Census at or below the cost of the 2010 Census level while maintaining accuracy without much-needed investment in final testing, operational and IT development, and timely field preparations.

Fiscal year 2017 is a critical one for the Census Bureau as we near the 2020 Decennial Census. The Census Bureau will be working to complete production of interoperable systems for the reengineered decennial. To do so, the Bureau requires funding to fully evaluate and develop new methods and operations.

Thank you again for your leadership on the Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittees and your support for the U.S. scientific enterprise. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or if COSSA can be of assistance to you.

Sincerely,



Wendy A. Naus  
Executive Director  
Consortium of Social Sciences Associations