Testimony in Support of Fiscal Year 2021 Funding for the National Science Foundation, Census Bureau, National Institute of Justice, and Bureau of Justice Statistics
Prepared for the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations, United States House of Representatives

Submitted by Wendy A. Naus, Executive Director
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March 13, 2020

On behalf of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), I offer this written testimony for inclusion in the official committee record. For fiscal year (FY) 2021, COSSA urges the Committee to appropriate $9 billion for the National Science Foundation (NSF), $1.68 billion for the Census Bureau, $41 million for the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), and $48 million for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). First, I wish to thank the Subcommittee for its longstanding support for federal science agencies. Despite tough, ongoing fiscal challenges, the Subcommittee has continued to maintain funding for basic research as a top priority. Thank you.

COSSA serves as a united voice for a broad, diverse network of organizations, institutions, communities, and stakeholders who care about a successful and vibrant social and behavioral science research enterprise. We represent the collective interests of all STEM disciplines engaged in the rigorous study of why and how humans behave as they do as individuals, groups and within institutions, organizations, and society.

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 produced by the Census Bureau and other federal statistical agencies provide data needed to conduct social science research to inform policy decisions. Taken together, federal social and behavioral science and statistical data help provide answers to complex, human-centered questions.

To cite just a few examples[1]:

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[1] https://www.cossa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/stories-one-pager.pdf

- Major leaps in emulating human mental capabilities in the fields of information technology and computer science, such as in machine translation and artificial intelligence, have been possible thanks to basic linguistic research.
- Anthropologists applied expertise in cultural practices to guide policy and shape interventions and strategy in combatting the Ebola epidemic in West Africa.
- Research in psychology and economics has shown that individuals are not saving enough for retirement and led to enactment of the *Pension Protection Act of 2006*, encouraging the use of practices such as automatic enrollment, employer contribution, contribution escalation, and qualified default investment alternative practices.

In short, knowledge derived from social and behavioral science research has made our population healthier, our democracy fairer, our nation safer, and our economy stronger. Without these sciences, policymaking on major national and global issues would not be based on evidence, and billions of dollars would be wasted.

National Science Foundation

COSSA joins the broader scientific community in support of **$9 billion for the National Science Foundation (NSF) in FY 2021**. Just as important, NSF and the broader U.S. scientific enterprise require stability, predictability, and sustainable funding growth, as well as federal policies that are patient and can tolerate a reasonable amount of risk in order to achieve the greatest payoff.

NSF is the only U.S. federal agency tasked with supporting basic scientific research across all fields of science. NSF supports about a quarter of all federally funded basic scientific research conducted at colleges and universities nationwide and serves as the largest single funder of university-based basic social and behavioral science research. Though NSF's Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorate (SBE)—one of seven research directorates at NSF—represents less than five percent of the entire NSF research budget, it supports around two-thirds of total federal funding for academic basic research in the social and behavioral sciences (excluding psychology). As the primary funding source for the majority of our disciplines, stagnant or reduced funding for SBE has an outsized impact on the social and behavioral science community. As increased investment is made in NSF, we are hopeful the social, behavioral and economic sciences will see commensurate increases.

Further, while by far the smallest of the research directorates, SBE's impact is huge. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine stated in its 2017 consensus report, *The Value of Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences to National Priorities*[2], that "nearly every major challenge the United States faces—from alleviating unemployment to protecting itself from terrorism—requires understanding the causes and consequences of people's behavior. Even societal challenges that at first glance appear to be issues only of medicine or engineering or computer science have social and behavioral components."

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[2] https://www.nap.edu/catalog/24790/the-value-of-social-behavioral-and-economic-sciences-to-national-priorities

While continuing to serve as the home for basic scientific discovery, NSF has also been planning and funding research activities as part of its 10 Big Ideas for Future NSF Investment over the last several years. The concepts, goals, and directions of the Big Ideas are exciting and promise to push the frontiers of science. However, we remain concerned about NSF losing its defining characteristic, which is to be the incubator for basic scientific discovery across all areas of science. While we encourage support for the Big Ideas in FY 2021, we hope that such investments do not come at the expense of NSF's core research activities. NSF's investigator-initiated, discovery-driven identity is what makes it special and has kept the American science enterprise at the leading edge of innovation. **COSSA urges the Committee to ensure a balanced approach is taken within NSF to support the 10 Big Ideas and NSF's core research activities.**

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Census Bureau
U.S. Department of Commerce

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COSSA requests that the Committee appropriate $1.681 billion for the Census Bureau in FY 2021, including $288.4 million for Current Surveys and Programs and $1.393 billion for Periodic Censuses and Surveys. Social scientists across the country rely on the Census Bureau for accurate, timely, objective, and relevant data to better understand the U.S. population and to produce findings that help us shape policies that better serve the American people.

As peak operations for the 2020 Census wrap up, the Census Bureau will turn its attention in FY 2021 to producing the Constitutionally-mandated apportionment and redistricting data as well as publishing other data produced by the census count. In addition, the Bureau will begin the process of closing out the massive 2020 Census operation: releasing staff, closing out offices, and decommissioning equipment.

With this shift in focus away from the decennial census, the Census Bureau faces an opportunity to devote significant effort to modernize the Bureau to meet the challenges of 21st century data collection. With sufficient Congressional support, the Census Bureau can transition its massive integrated data collection processing program created for the 2020 Census into a Bureau-wide program that can take in data from across the Census Bureau's programs and surveys and create efficiencies.[3] At the same time, the Census Bureau will require adequate resources to expand its data storage and analysis capabilities, continue its work to improve linking data from administrative records and big data sources, and ensure that the Bureau continues to set the standard in data security and disclosure avoidance.

In addition, **COSSA calls on Congress to fully fund the American Community Survey (ACS) and maintain its status as a mandatory federal survey.** The ACS is the only source of comparable, consistent, timely, and high-quality demographic and socio-economic data for all communities in the U.S. As a component of the Decennial Census, the ACS is a "mandatory" national survey. The accuracy of the data collected by the ACS relies on this mandatory status. Targeted cuts and

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[3] https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2020-02/fy2021_census_congressional_budget_justification.pdf

changes to make the survey voluntary would significantly undermine the ability to collect usable data on all U.S. counties, particularly in less populous, rural areas of the country.

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National Institute of Justice and Bureau of Justice Statistics
U.S. Department of Justice

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COSSA urges the Committee to appropriate $41 million for the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and $48 million for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) within the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) in FY 2021. NIJ serves as the research arm of the Department of Justice, filling an important role in helping the agency to understand and implement science-based strategies for crime prevention and control. It supports rigorous social science research that can be disseminated to criminal justice professionals to keep communities safe. Both agencies received devastating cuts in FY 2019 and FY 2020, making increases in FY 2021 even more crucial as NIJ and BJS must now address new Congressional mandates, including implementation of the *FIRST STEP Act*.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) is 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 modest annual investments represent the only dedicated sources of federal research support committed to enhancing our understanding of crime and the criminal justice system, including around topics like victimization, law enforcement, recidivism and reentry, drugs and crime, and tribal justice.

The U.S. faces numerous pressing criminal justice and law enforcement challenges, including understanding the mental health needs of people involved in the justice system, the drivers of domestic radicalization, effective solutions to opioid addiction, and ways to improve police officer safety and community relations. By working with jurisdictions at all levels to compile data and support research, DOJ—through NIJ and BJS investments— provides key insights that improve public safety. Making the results of this research available to state and local officials and the public allows justice and law enforcement professionals to learn what works, adopt best practices, and improve public safety by leveraging the best research and data to protect the public, reduce recidivism, and support law enforcement and communities. Congress must prioritize federal data collection and research if we are to provide local, state, and federal officials with the information they need to develop strategies to improve public safety in our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this statement. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require additional information.