May 23, 2012

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski, Chair
Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison, Ranking Member
Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Mikulski and Hutchison:

The undersigned members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) urge you to fully fund the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) and oppose any efforts to make the response to the survey voluntary. The ACS provides vital economic, social, and housing data on many of our counties, cities, Congressional districts, towns, and communities that are not provided anywhere else. The ACS is particularly critical to the disability community because it was the first reliable measure of disability in the general population.

CCD is a coalition of national disability organizations working together to advocate for national public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society. Since 1973, the CCD has advocated on behalf of people of all ages with disabilities and their families. CCD has worked to achieve federal legislation and regulations that assure that the 62 million children and adults with disabilities are fully integrated into the mainstream of society.

The six question framework used by the ACS provides a model for standardizing the way we collect data on disability in “general purpose” government surveys. The disability questions are now used in the Current Population Survey to provide reliable information on unemployment among people with disabilities and in the National Health Interview Survey to provide information on the health status of people with disabilities and in other national surveys. This data is critical to gathering a clearer picture of the lives of individuals with disabilities and measuring our success at achieving integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in mainstream society.
The ACS data drives federal funding of critical programs and helps assess whether policies are working, or whether they need to be revisited with new approaches and strategies. Our government’s policy debates are driven by data and people with disabilities must be appropriately counted by the federal government’s statistical agencies in order to be included in these debates. If we take away the foundation of gathering disability data, it will weaken the disability voice in policy making, and ultimately reduce the services and supports available to people with disabilities.

CCD urges you to fully fund the ACS and protect the program from harmful amendments that would reduce its effectiveness. If you have questions or would like additional information please contact Julie Ward (ward@thearc.org)

On Behalf of:

ACCSES
American Association on Health and Disability
American Counseling Association
American Foundation for the Blind
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
American Therapeutic Recreation Association
Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs
Autism National Committee
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Brain Injury Association of America
Council for Learning Disabilities
Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
Easter Seals
Epilepsy Foundation
Everyone Reading
Institute for Educational Leadership
International Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Lutheran Services in America Disability Network
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Council on Independent Living
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Society
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Rehabilitation Association
National Respite Coalition
Paralyzed Veterans of America
The Advocacy Institute
The Arc of the United States
United Cerebral Palsy
United Spinal Association