



September 25, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

We, the undersigned, represent 120 former chairs, members, and staff of the U.S. President's Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) during the administrations of Joseph Biden, Donald Trump, Barack Obama, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George H.W. Bush, Ronald Reagan, and Lyndon Johnson. At CEA, we regularly advised the president, White House staff, Cabinet members, and others about developments in the U.S. economy and regularly relied on insights made possible only by the Current Population Survey (CPS).

We write to alert you to an emergent threat to the quality of this critical national economic indicator. We all rely on this data and are deeply concerned about its future, given its influence on global financial markets and macroeconomic policymaking. Despite its invaluable data, including the monthly unemployment rate, the CPS is under threat of cuts to its sample size due to inadequate resources. To preserve the accuracy and integrity of the monthly unemployment rate and associated measures of labor market activity, as well as enact overdue steps to modernize its data collection, we strongly urge you to provide an additional \$20.6 million above FY 2024 levels for the CPS in any final fiscal year 2025 (FY25) appropriations or continuing resolution for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS-Ed).

Following two years of flat funding, BLS has announced plans to survey fewer households for each month's CPS starting in January 2025. This follows more than a decade of enacting alternative cost-saving measures such as reducing the number of in-person visits to households, non-response follow-up, field training, and more. Since collecting labor market information from fewer people will endanger the reliability of metrics such as national unemployment and labor force participation, this step is a last resort that has been delayed for as long as possible by exhausting all other available means.

The rise in operating costs stems from two factors. First, the cost of in-person data collection has steadily risen over the past decade. This stems from increased labor costs for data collectors, in addition to the need to contact households repeatedly to encourage their participation. The participation rate in the CPS has been steadily falling, and first fell below 90 percent in December 2012. It dropped precipitously in 2020 and was 67 and 71 percent in the past two years, respectively.

Second, and more subtle, costs have increased due to a lack of funding for a reformed and modernized CPS. A decade ago, BLS and the Census Bureau began work to develop new, Internet-based ways to collect data. As described in this recent presentation to the Federal Economic Statistics Advisory Committee, the timeline for modernization can be carried out in just three years contingent on funding. However, for several decades the U.S. has failed to allocate the resources required to implement these modernizing efforts. After adjusting for inflation, overall BLS funding has fallen by more than 20 percent from a high in 2010 and more than 13 percent since the sample size became approximately 60,000 households in 2001.

Reducing the CPS sample size will make its statistics less reliable. Not only will uncertainty surrounding the top-line statistics edge up, as noted in a statement from the American Economic Association, but it will also hinder accurate analysis of states and local areas and subpopulations, including teenagers, seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, the self-employed, people who identify as Asian, Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, and Black or African Americans. Furthermore, it would inhibit the analysis of the intersections of these demographics by geography and sex. Already, disaggregated data by state cannot be produced for some racial and ethnic groups. Should cuts to the CPS sample size be enacted, there simply will not be sufficient representation in the sample to trust timely disaggregated findings and information on these demographic groups likely will disappear entirely from the monthly Employment Situation report. And finally, a smaller sample also makes the system less resilient. It raises the risk that BLS will be forced to delay or miss a monthly release because of a major disruption such as extreme weather or another pandemic - moments when accurate, localized labor market information is particularly critical.

Providing BLS with \$718.6 million – \$650.6 million in congressional appropriations (an additional \$20.6 million above FY 2024 levels) and \$68 million which may be expended from the Employment Security Administration account in the Unemployment Trust Fund for FY 2025 – would prevent cuts to the CPS sample size this year, and with continued investment for the following two fiscal years, will save the CPS from further sample erosion. The BLS-Census Bureau plan for a new, modern CPS could be fully implemented in as little as three years and would prevent future cuts to the sample as survey response rates to phone and in-person survey techniques continue to trend downward. The individual components of that funding are broken out as follows:

1. Congress can provide the BLS Division of Employment and Unemployment Statistics with \$12 million dollars in FY2025—an additional \$4.4 million above the President’s request. This increase to annual funding would support the current operations of the CPS.
2. Second, and most importantly, Congress can commit to a multi-year modernization initiative (as proposed in the Administration’s FY2024 budget) to prepare the CPS for success in the 21st Century with an initial appropriation of \$15 million in FY2025 in addition to the above request.

We join together and write today because we know that the immediate problems facing CPS are real, urgent, and can be readily solved with some stop-gap funding. In addition, we know that BLS and Census cannot achieve a healthier CPS without development funding for a modernized labor market survey over the next few years. We urge Congress, with your leadership, to find a bipartisan solution to shore up the CPS now and support its modernization, thereby assuring private and public policymakers that they can confidently base decisions on the invaluable data contained in that survey now and into the future.

Respectfully,

Katharine G. Abraham
CEA Member, 2011-2013
Distinguished University Professor
University of Maryland

Randall Akee
CEA Senior Economist, 2022-2023
Professor
UCLA

Elizabeth Oltmans Ananat
CEA Senior Economist, 2010
Mallya Professor of Women and Economics
Barnard College, Columbia University

Bevin Ashenmiller
CEA Senior Economist, 2012-2013
Associate Professor of Economics
Occidental College

Scott Baier
CEA, 2007-2008
Professor and Department Chair
Clemson University

Joseph V. Balagtas
CEA Senior Economist, 2019-2020
Professor of Agricultural Economics
Purdue University

Jacob Bastian
CEA Senior Economist, 2023-2024
Assistant Professor of Economics
Rutgers University

Victor Bennett
CEA Senior Economist, 2016-2017
Professor of Entrepreneurship and Strategy
University of Utah

Ben S. Bernanke
CEA Chair, 2005-2006; Chair, Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2006-2014;
Nobel Laureate, 2022
Distinguished Senior Fellow
The Brookings Institution

Alan Blinder
CEA Member, 1993-1994
Professor of Economics
Princeton University

Michael J. Boskin
CEA Chair, 1989-1993
Wohlford Family Senior Fellow & Tully M. Friedman Professor of Economics
Hoover Institution & Dept. of Economics, Stanford University

R. Daniel Bressler
CEA Staff Economist, 2021-2022
PhD Candidate
Columbia University

Jeffrey R Brown
CEA Senior Economist, 2001-2002
Larry Gies Family Professor of Business
University of Illinois Urbana Champaign

Zach Y. Brown
CEA Staff Economist, 2014-2015
Assistant Professor of Economics
University of Michigan

Christopher Carroll
CEA Senior Staff Macroeconomist, 1997-1998 and 2009-2010
Professor of Economics
Johns Hopkins University

Gabriel Chodorow-Reich
CEA Staff Economist, 2009-2010; CEA Economist, 2010
George Fisher Baker Professor of Economics
Harvard University

William J. Collins
CEA Senior Economist, 2006-2007
Professor of Economics
Vanderbilt University

Aaron Cooke
CEA Senior Economist, 2020-2021

Judd Cramer
CEA Staff Economist, 2011-2012

Ryan Cummings
CEA Staff Economist, 2021-2023
Researcher, Stanford Institute for Economic Policy
Stanford University

David Cutler
CEA Staff Economist, 1993
Otto Eckstein Professor of Applied Economics
Harvard University

Neha Dalal
CEA Intern, 2015; CEA Research Economist, 2016-2017; CEA Staff Economist, 2017

Thomas DeLeire
CEA Senior Economist, 2002-2003
Distinguished Professor
McCourt School of Public Policy, Georgetown University

William Theodore Dickens
CEA Senior Economist, 1993-1994
University Distinguished Professor of Economics and Public Policy
Northeastern University

Jane Dokko
CEA Senior Economist, 2013-2015
Private citizen

Karen Dynan
CEA Senior Economist, 2003-2004
Professor of the Practice
Harvard University Economics Department; Harvard Kennedy School

Wendy Edelberg
CEA Senior Economist, 2008-2009
Director of The Hamilton Project and Senior Fellow at Brookings
Brookings

Douglas Elmendorf
CEA Senior Economist, 1998-1999
Professor
Harvard Kennedy School

Jana Epstein
CEA Intern, 2015; CEA Research Economist, 2016-2017

Laura Feiveson
CEA Staff Economist, 2009-2010
Federal Government

Naomi Feldman
CEA Senior Economist, 2017-2018
Professor
Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Matthew Fiedler
CEA Economist, 2013; CEA Senior Economist, 2013-2015;
CEA Chief Economist, 2015-2017
Senior Fellow
The Brookings Institution

Conor Foley
CEA Intern, 2012; CEA Staff Economist, 2016-2017

Madison Fox
CEA Statistical Office Associate, 2022-2024

Jeffrey A. Frankel
CEA Senior Economist, 1983-85; CEA Chief Economist, 1996-98; CEA Member, 1997-99
Professor
Harvard University

Melanie Friedrichs
CEA Staff Economist, 2022-2023
Researcher
Office of Financial Research, U.S. Department of the Treasury

Jason Furman
CEA Staff Economist, 1996-1997; CEA Chair, 2013-2017
Aetna Professor of the Practice of Economic Policy
Harvard University

Peter Ganong
CEA Research Assistant, 2009-2010
Associate Professor of Public Policy
University of Chicago

Emily Gee
CEA Economist, 2016-2017
Senior Vice President for Inclusive Growth
Center for American Progress

Michael Geruso
CEA Senior Economist, 2023-2024
Associate Professor of Economics
University of Texas at Austin

Chloe Gibbs
CEA Senior Economist, 2022-2023
University of Notre Dame

Kenneth Gillingham
CEA Senior Economist, 2015-2016
Professor
Yale University

Martha Gimbel
CEA Staff Economist, 2014-2016, CEA Senior Advisor, 2021-2023

Laura Giuliano
CEA Senior Economist, 2015-2016
Professor of Economics
University of California, Santa Cruz

Sherry Glied
CEA Staff Economist, 1992-1993
Dean and Professor of Public Service
New York University

Joshua Goodman
CEA Senior Economist, 2022-2023
Associate Professor
Boston University

Sarena Goodman
CEA Research Assistant, 2005-2006; CEA Staff Economist, 2009-2010
Federal Government

Keith Hall
CEA Chief Economist, 2005-2008

Stephen Harrell
CEA Staff Economist, 2016-2017

Jon Haveman
CEA Senior Economist, 2018-2019
Executive Director
National Economic Education Deegation

James J. Heckman
CEA Junior Economic Adviser, 1967; Nobel Laureate, 2000
The Henry Schultz Distinguished Service Professor in Economics
University of Chicago

Eric Helland
CEA Senior Economist, 2003-2004
Professor of Economic
Claremont McKenna College

Susan Helper
CEA Senior Economist, 2012-2013 and 2021-2022
Carlton Professor of Economics
Case Western Reserve University

Bradley Herring
CEA Senior Economist, 2006-2007
McKerley Professor of Health Economics
University of New Hampshire

Sandile Hlatshwayo
CEA Senior Economist, 2023-2024

Mallick Hossain
CEA Staff Economist, 2015-2016

R. Glenn Hubbard
CEA Chair, 2001-2003
Russell L. Carson Professor of Economics and Finance
Columbia University

Adam B Jaffe
CEA Senior Staff Economist, 1990-1991
Fred C Hecht Professor in Economics, Emeritus
Brandeis University

Damon Jones
CEA Senior Economist, 2021-2022
Associate Professor
University of Chicago

Andrew G. Keeler
CEA Senior Economist, 2000-2001; CEA Senior Staff Economist, 2000-2001
Professor Emeritus
UNC Coastal Studies Institute

Sanders Korenman
CEA Senior Economist, 1997-1998
Associate Dean and Professor
Marx School of Public & International Affairs, Baruch College, City University of New York

Douglas Kruse
CEA Senior Economist, 2013-2014
Distinguished Professor
Rutgers University

Victoria Lee
CEA Staff Economist, 2021-2022
Harvard University

Nicholas Li
CEA Staff Economist, 2012-2013
George Washington University

Joshua Linn
CEA Senior Economist, 2014-2015

Zachary Liscow
CEA Staff Economist, 2009-2010
Professor
Yale University

John A List
CEA Senior Economist, 2002-2004
Professor
University of Chicago

Adam Looney
CEA Senior Economist 2009-2010
University of Utah

Donald B. Marron
CEA Chief Economist, 2004-2005; CEA Consultant, 2007-2008; CEA Member 2008-2009
Institute Fellow
Urban Institute

Aparna Mathur
CEA Senior Economist, 2020-2021
Former Senior Fellow
Harvard Kennedy School

Jordan Matsudaira
Chief Economist, 2013-2015
Professor
American University

Matthew Maury
CEA Research Assistant, 2021-2022
Law Student
New York University

William Melick
CEA Senior Economist, 2001-2002
Gensemer Professor of Economics
Kenyon College

Andrew Metrick
CEA Senior Economist, 2009; CEA Chief Economist, 2010
Professor of Finance
Yale University

Frances Moore
CEA Senior Economist, 2022-2023
Associate Professor
University of California Davis

Alicia H. Munnell
CEA Member, 1995-1997
Peter F. Drucker Professor of Management Sciences
Carroll School of Management, Boston College

William Nober
CEA Staff Economist, 2023-2024
Ph.D. Candidate
Columbia University

Stephen Kojo Nyarko
CEA Research Assistant, 2021-2023
Yale University

Maurice Obstfeld
CEA Member, 2014-2015
C. Fred Bergsten Senior Fellow
Peterson Institute for International Economics

Pia M Orrenius
CEA Senior Economist, 2004-2005
Vice President
Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas

Stephen T. Parente
CEA Senior Economist, 2019-2021
Minnesota Insurance Industry Chair of Health Finance
University of Minnesota

Anna Pasnau
CEA Research Assistant, 2021-2023; CEA Special Advisor, 2023-2024
Research Associate
MIT

Daniel Polsky
CEA Senior Economist, 2007-2008
Bloomberg Distinguished Professor of Health Economics and Policy

Emma Rackstraw
CEA Research Associate, 2014-2015; CEA Research Economist, 2015-2016
Assistant Professor of Economics
Swarthmore College

Nirupama Rao
CEA Intern, 2003; CEA Senior Economist, 2015-2016
Assistant Professor of Business Economics
University of Michigan, Ross School of Business

Cordelia Reimers
CEA Senior Economist, 1998-1999
Professor Emerita of Economics
Hunter College & The Graduate Center, City University of New York

David P. Richardson
CEA Senior Economist, 2006 - 2007
Head of Research and Managing Director
TIAA Institute

Kevin Rinz
CEA Staff Economist, 2013-2014; CEA Senior Economist, 2021-2022
Senior Fellow and Research Advisor
Washington Center for Equitable Growth

Sarah Robinson
CEA Research Assistant, 2021-2022
PhD Student
Harvard University

Katheryn Niles Russ
CEA Senior Economist, 2015-2016
Professor of Economics
University of California, Davis

Claudia Sahm
CEA Senior Economist, 2015-2016
Chief Economist
New Century Advisors

Andrew Samwick
CEA Chief Economist, 2003-2004
Professor of Economics
Dartmouth College

Safia Sayed
CEA Research Assistant, 2021-2022

Richard Schmalensee
CEA Summer Staff, 1967; CEA Member, 1989-1991
Prof of Economics and Management, Emeritus
MIT

Krista Schwarz
CEA Senior Economist, 2023-2024
Principal Economist
Federal Reserve Board

Judith Scott-Clayton
CEA Senior Economist, 2022-2023
Professor of Economics & Education
Teachers College, Columbia University

Robert Seamans
CEA Senior Economist, 2015-2016
Professor
New York University

Naomi Shimberg
CEA Intern, 2022; CEA Research Assistant, 2023-2024
MIT

Timothy Simcoe
CEA Senior Economist, 2014-2015
David J. McGrath Jr. Professor of Management
Boston University Questrom School of Management

Jason Sockin
CEA Research Economist, 2015-2016

Aaron Sojourner
CEA Senior Economist, 2016-2017
Senior Economist
W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research

Joseph E. Stiglitz
CEA Member, 1993-1995; CEA Chair, 1995-1997; Nobel Laureate, 2001
University Professor
Columbia University

Kenneth Swinnerton
CEA Senior Economist, 2013-2014

John Taylor
CEA Senior Staff Economist; CEA Member
Professor
Stanford University

Ernie Tedeschi
CEA Chief Economist, 2023-2024; CEA Senior Policy Economist, 2021-2023
Director of Economics
The Budget Lab at Yale University

Natalie Tomeh
CEA Research Assistant, 2022-2024

Victoria Udalova
CEA Senior Economist, 2022-2023

Alan Viard
CEA Senior Economist, 2003-2004
Senior Fellow Emeritus
American Enterprise Institute

Jennifer Vogl
CEA Economic Statistician, 2016-2018

David Wasser
CEA Intern, 2012-2013; CEA Research Assistant, 2013-2014
Economist
Census Bureau

Paige Weber
CEA Staff Economist, 2016
Assistant Professor
University of California, Berkeley

Sarah Wheaton
CEA Research Assistant, 2021-2023

David Wilcox
CEA Senior Economist, 1994-95
Former Director
Division of Research and Statistics, Federal Reserve System

Andrew Wilson
CEA Staff Economist, 2022-2023
Postdoctoral Fellow
Stanford University

Joseph Winkelmann
CEA Staff Economist, 2022-2023
Harvard University

Paula R. Worthington
CEA Senior Economist, 2017-2018
Senior Lecturer
Harris School, University of Chicago

Jacqueline Yen
CEA Staff Economist 2010

Owen Zidar
CEA Staff Economist, 2010-2011
Professor of Economics, Princeton University
Princeton University

Joshua Graff Zivin
CEA Senior Economist, 2004-2005
Professor of Economics and Global Policy
University of California, San Diego

Cc The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
 The Honorable Shelley Capito
 The Honorable Robert Aderholt