



July 3, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services and Education
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services and Education
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services and Education
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services and Education
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Blunt, Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Murray, and Ranking Member Cole,

We, the undersigned members of the Friends of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) are writing to thank you for providing the BLS with increased funding in FY 2020 and to encourage you to sustain investment in the agency by providing the Bureau with no less than the Administration's FY 2021 request, \$658 million.

Thanks to your leadership, BLS has an additional \$16 million in FY 2020 to modernize its data collection and dissemination capacities, improve its ongoing programs, better understand the impact of the digital economy on our workforce, and begin planning and development of a new National Longitudinal Survey of Youth cohort. We hope that FY 2020 marks the beginning of an effort to reverse the agency's diminishing purchasing power, which has fallen 13% since FY 2009.

The administration's request level is a positive step towards the restoration of BLS resources. We fully support the proposals. Most critical is the final tranche of funding for the physical move of BLS. Without these funds, BLS will be forced to curtail spending on all its programs, which will delay modernizations and could endanger their quality or continuity. In addition, we support the proposed improvements to the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS). The increased sample size for JOLTS will enable state-level data and more detailed industry data, which will be especially helpful to governors, regional economic development organizations, and other policymakers. We also support the proposed investments for the Consumer Expenditure program. This program is overdue for a new design given its burden on respondents. Resources now feasible through big data and technological advances have the potential to improve inflation and poverty measurement. These improved programs will be especially informative as our country recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic and its profound impact on business dynamics and consumption patterns.

We urge that the increase in funding in FY 2020 be the start of sustained multi-year increases for the BLS



to take full advantage of advances in data collection and statistical methods. To produce the high-quality statistics required for a thriving, 21st century economy, BLS must become a 21st century data agency. It is critical that BLS has the funding to take full advantage of alternative sources of data that greatly reduce respondent burden, provide policy makers and the public with real-time data, and through use of advanced statistical modelling techniques vastly improves the coverage of the economy, especially at state and local levels. BLS also needs the agility to create one-time surveys of establishments on topics of emerging policy interest. The economic landscape can change so quickly, as the last few months attest. In February, the conversation was around job shortages and just a few months later, we are focusing on job loss and a hope for recovery. Businesses and policymakers need information on the current economic climate and that requires a 21st century approach to collecting and reporting data.

As Congress acts to help the nation recover from the COVID-19 recession, we urge you to include improving labor market data as an element of infrastructure investments. In particular, we support investment to work with states to upgrade the quality of state Unemployment Insurance worker records and to grant BLS access to those state-owned administrative records, with permission to share data back to the states. These steps would enable BLS to produce far more granular and timely labor market information, benefiting public, business, and family decision-makers at the national, state and local levels. For states, access to each other's wage records is critical for program evaluation requirements under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, analysis of labor-sheds that cross state borders and helping allocate funds to train workers for jobs most in demand. Implementation would also reduce costs to perform federal policy evaluations, supporting evidence-based policymaking at the national level.

With your support during these challenging times, BLS can continue to fully support evidence-based policymaking, smart program evaluation, and confident business investment. Thank you for your dedicated interest in this critical part of our national data infrastructure and for considering our views as you prepare the FY 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations bill and deliberate on economic stimulus measures.

Sincerely,
Erica L. Groshen, Ph.D.
Chair, The Friends of BLS
Commissioner, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013-2017



Organizations

American Statistical Association

Association of Population Centers

Association of Public Data Users (APDU)

Bureau of Labor Statistics

Center for Economic and Policy Research

Clayton Economics

Council for Community and Economic Research

Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics (COPAFS)

Data Coalition

Economic Innovation Group

EurekaFacts, LLC

Forland Consulting, LLC

Haver Analytics

IHS Markit

Insights Association

Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research

National Association for Business Economics

National Urban League

NWE, LLC

Population Association of America

StratoDem Analytics

The Lande Group

The WorkPlace

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