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July 31, 2020

Cassandra Logan  
Survey Director  
U.S. Census Bureau  
4600 Silver Hill Rd.  
Suitland-Silver Hill, MD 20746

Re: Agency Information Collection Activities; Submission to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for Review and Approval; Comment Request; Household Pulse Survey, OMB Control Number 0607-1013

Dear Director Logan:

I write to you on behalf of First Focus on Children and as an advocate for children, in response to the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) request for comment the continuation of the Household Pulse Survey.

First Focus on Children is a bipartisan advocacy organization that is dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal policy and budget decisions. Due to the hardships that children continue to face in the wake of COVID-19, we submit this comment in favor of extending data collection for the Household Pulse Survey during the pandemic. We also propose that current questions be updated, and important new questions be added to better capture the effect of the pandemic on children and families.

The coronavirus pandemic has hit the United States and the rest of the world with a once-in-a-generation event creating uncertainty, instability, and harm that will hold for years to come. Many researchers and policymakers have focused on the economic impacts of the crisis, but more emphasis is needed on how the crisis is impacting our most vulnerable population - our nation's children. Millions of children have seen a disruption in their education, lost access to nutritious meals, face housing insecurity, or are at risk of slipping into poverty because of the economic crisis. To make matters even worse, the long-term implications of this crisis will likely last well beyond the coronavirus itself, impacting the health and development of children for years to come. It is incredibly important that we continue to monitor the havoc caused by the situation and put forward solutions in real-time to these problems.

Our organization has found the survey data to be helpful in developing our policy and budget analyses during the pandemic, and we are appreciative that the Census Household Pulse Survey has put a necessary spotlight on one aspect that traditional survey measures neglect: how children are faring. While the Current Population Survey (CPS) provides a vital resource for researchers and advocates to understand Americans' situations, the CPS lags at too slow of a pace for it to be helpful in the middle of an unprecedented crisis like the one we face now and often focuses too much on the broadest view of the population as a whole.

On the other hand, the Household Pulse Survey provides a nearly real-time update on the American experience from multiple points of view, which is especially important while we're in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. The specific questions on educational attainment, food security, health insurance coverage, housing status, and employment characteristics provide us with a deeper look at how households with children are faring. These weekly updates inform policymakers and the public about the stakes,

consequences, and effects of the current situation, and they often inform us weeks in advance of what the CPS will tell us the following month.

We strongly support the continuation of this survey for at least 14 more weeks, but preferably through at least the beginning of 2021 or until widespread vaccination has ended the pandemic and allowed these critical indicators to stabilize. The Household Pulse Survey will be an invaluable tool for lawmakers and the public seeking to address our most pressing needs, and it will continue to highlight the oft-ignored challenges that households with children face. The Census Bureau should consider making the real-time nature of the Household Pulse Survey a long-term reality; providing weekly updates on the ongoing reality for U.S. children and adults serves an important purpose even outside of a global pandemic.

Though the current iteration of the Household Pulse Survey asks important questions, it can be doing more to better capture the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and families. We therefore also recommend that the following questions be updated and/or added to improve upon the survey.

### **How many children in the household are under 5? How many are 5 to 12? How many are 13-17?**

The Household Pulse Survey collects data on the number of children living in a respondent's household, but it does not ask about the age of any children living in the home. The needs of children vary drastically by age, which has consequences for families' finances as well as school systems and plays a large role in how both families and school administrators are thinking about education and child care decisions. We suggest that the current question be updated to ask how many children in the household are under 5, how many are 5 to 12, and how many are 13 to 17. This adjustment would give us insight into families' needs for full time child care and part-time child care and whether education programs are working well for elementary and secondary students.

### **What kind of child care services are being utilized by members of the household? What would be your preferred setting for children in the household?**

Many families with young children are facing difficult choices about how to access child care and whether to send their children to child care settings. During the pandemic, child care providers experience many of the same operational challenges as schools (e.g. smaller class sizes, requiring children to be six feet apart, increased need for additional supplies in order to reduce sharing among children, etc.), but these are exacerbated by the lack of public financing for child care and the needs and necessary requirements for younger children in those settings. This means that policy solutions that aim to protect children attending schools are much more difficult to extend to younger children who are in child care settings.

We are proposing that the Census Bureau add questions to the Household Pulse Survey about the decision's families are making around child care. It should ask what kind of child care services they are using (child care centers/preschool; before/after care; paid care in someone else's home; paid care in their own homes; paid or no-cost care by friends and family; parental/guardian care at home; taking the child to work; child left unattended at home.) In addition to asking about what child care settings families have chosen, the survey should also ask what their preferred child care setting would be, and, if it's different than the one they are using, whether they have been unable to find such a program, unable to afford it, or the hours do not match their needs. Finding affordable child care is one of the greatest challenges facing parents and caretakers who work outside the home under normal circumstances. Child care is now in crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Child care programs have incurred significantly increased costs and reduced income in order to meet COVID safety requirements, including reduced class size, new equipment, and increased cleaning costs, and many programs have closed temporarily or permanently. For these working families, the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic could be exacerbated by challenges in securing child care, and without a stable

and safe child care sector, our economy cannot begin to restart. Without data on this matter, policymakers are unable to consider targeted solutions for families with young children.

Week by week we have seen how the pandemic has directly increased food insecurity, job losses, educational and child care challenges, and housing insecurity nationwide. Without such data, we would not know the full extent of this crisis and what policies are needed most to ensure Americans, especially children, are getting the help they need.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this comment. If you have any questions, please contact me at [Brucel@firstfocus.org](mailto:Brucel@firstfocus.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Lesley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline for the "y".

Bruce Lesley  
President