

Opening Statement
**JEC Hearing on “The Economic Impacts of the 2020
Census and Business Uses of Federal Data”**
May 22, 2019, 2:00pm
210 Cannon House Office Building

Good afternoon, and thank you for joining us for this hearing of the Joint Economic Committee. I want to thank Vice-Chair Maloney for organizing a discussion about this very important series of topics.

Today, federal data and surveys provide the American people invaluable information about our nation’s society and our economy. But there are two key categories of information that are currently absent from our federal surveys – categories that I’d like to highlight during today’s hearing.

First, our federal surveys – and in particular, the American Community Survey (ACS) and Current Population Survey (CPS) – fail to include information about past involvement with the criminal justice system. In other words, they do not tell us whether someone has been convicted of a crime, been on probation or parole, or been incarcerated.

Such data would be invaluable for understanding how much these experiences are a barrier to employment. For example, it would help us answer questions like:

How many people out of the labor force are there because they have criminal records? And how does this vary in terms of geography and demographics?

In our own research on prime-age men who are out of the labor force, the JEC's Social Capital Project has found that one-third of these men have been incarcerated. And there is further evidence to suggest that men who are not employed are more likely to have a criminal record than men who are.

Indeed, we ought to have a fuller picture of this often-forgotten segment of our population and figure out what is necessary to help them. Our goal should be to make sure that our justice system is, in fact, just – that the punishment fits both the crime and the criminal, being neither too lenient nor too harsh – and to help these men and women re-enter society and become productive members of our families and communities.

That's precisely why I've worked with many of my colleagues on legislation to this end, like the First Step Act, which was signed into law by the president this past December and included much-needed sentencing and prison reforms. Having more complete data on these topics in our federal surveys would only further aid us in achieving these goals.

Second, our surveys include limited information on social capital, or our associational life – which is arguably the most important factor for understanding our nation’s health and happiness.

The Current Population Survey has included a few questions on social capital and associational life since 2002, but there is much that is lacking. For instance, it provides little information on trust or confidence in our institutions, especially local ones. It does not track loneliness, happiness, or the availability of emotional support; and it does not include information on the availability of public amenities like libraries, parks, and playgrounds, which have been shown to correlate with community involvement.

The CPS could – and I think should – provide more information on the social interaction that takes place between families, friends, neighbors, congregants, and coworkers. And it could provide important details on the ways that technology hinders and helps social interaction.

Furthermore, having more social capital information in these surveys would help all of us simply because, as research shows, strong social capital is conducive to finding and getting work.

Learning this information would provide us some missing pieces to the puzzle, giving us a clearer picture of ways we can strengthen our economy and help our citizens be happy and productive members of our communities.

I look forward to hearing our witnesses' insights on these topics today. Thank you.