

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services and Education
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa Delauro
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
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Services and Education
Washington, DC 20515

3/19/2018

Dear Chairman Cole and Ranking Member Delauro,

The Bureau of Labor Statistics produces data that is essential for key policies that affect businesses and financial markets, government policies, and households faced with spending and career decisions.

Over the last 10 years, flat funding at BLS has meant the agency has been unable to invest in the staff development and innovation required to continue to serve the needs of all those who rely on the key economic statistics they produce. Without additional funding, BLS is at risk of introducing errors or consequential delays into key economic releases. Poor policy decisions based on inadequate or inaccurate data could cause a growing economy to slow. It is vital to ensure BLS has adequate resources to meet the needs of policymakers, businesses, program evaluators, researchers and everyday Americans.

The Friends of the Bureau of Labor Statistics recommend \$650 million in budget authority for the Bureau of Labor Statistics in FY 2019. This represents an increase of \$41 million over the FY 2019 administration request, and \$41 million over the FY 2017 enacted level.

With the additional funding, BLS can continue to contribute to evidence-based policymaking, smart program evaluation, and confident business investment by modernizing surveys, producing essential insights into the labor market, and investing in innovative technology.

Modern surveys

BLS could fully modernize the Consumer Expenditure Survey, which is critical to determining the Consumer Price Index, which measures inflation. This is used by the Social Security Administration to determine cost of living increases and by the Census Bureau to construct the Supplemental Poverty Measure. It is also used by the Federal Reserve to set interest rates and by businesses to escalate prices in multiyear contracts.

Other modernizations, including the Occupational Employment Survey, National Compensation Survey, Occupational Projections and the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, would allow state and local governments to understand the unique challenges they face. And firms would have more timely and detailed BLS local data to guide their business location and compensation decisions.

Competitive insights

Similarly, business and policymakers both rely on the BLS to provide the most reliable insights into the future of work. Additional funding would allow for an ongoing measure to the gig economy, an important emerging sector of the economy. A restored and modern Survey of Employer Provided Training would also benefit businesses and households by making sure that workforce training programs address key skills gaps, so that America's workers remain competitive.

Innovative technology

Finally, BLS could make improvements in staff development, cybersecurity, data capture and other IT capacities to meet the new challenges facing data collection, including tapping into more administrative and “big data” sources. It is becoming harder to accurately measure the vital economic conditions that BLS is responsible for. By developing staff and improving technology and dissemination with this additional funding, BLS will continue to provide the high quality, timely, accurate and trust worthy data that keeps the American businesses leading the way in the global economy.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics provides essential the labor market, workforce and consumer price data that are crucial to evidence-based policy making and supporting a strong economy. Thank you for your support of this vital agency.

Sincerely,

Erica Groshen
Chair, Friends of BLS

John Thompson
Co-Chair, Friends of BLS

Organizations

Association of Population Centers
Association of Public Data Users
APB Associates
California Center for Population Research at UCLA
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Council for Professional Associations for Federal Statistics
Council for Community and Economic Research
CUNY Institute for Demographic Research
Demos
National Association of Business Economics
National Beer Wholesalers Association
Population Association of America
Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research
Southeast Michigan Census Council
Workforce Data Quality Campaign

Individuals

Affiliations listed for identification only. Individuals have signed on their own behalf, and the views expressed are their own, not those of their institution, trustees or funders.

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David E. Weinstein, Carl S. Shoup Professor, Dept. of Economics, Columbia University
Brady West, Research Associate Professor, ISR and JPSM University of Maryland