



## CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

April 7, 1999

### **H.R. 929** **2000 Census Language Barrier Removal Act**

*As ordered reported by the House Committee on Government Reform on March 17, 1999*

In conducting the decennial census in 2000, the Bureau of the Census will mail every household a questionnaire. The bureau plans to provide an alternative questionnaire in five languages other than English (Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog, or Korean) to those households that request one in writing. H.R. 929 would require the bureau to provide requesting households an alternative questionnaire in one of 34 languages, including English Braille. The bill also would allow the bureau to make additional copies of questionnaires in alternative languages available to enhance response rates in the 2000 decennial census.

Based on information from the bureau, CBO estimates that implementing H.R. 929 would cost between \$10 million and \$20 million in 2000, assuming appropriation of the necessary amount. H.R. 929 would not affect direct spending or receipts; therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures would not apply. H.R. 929 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act, and would impose no costs on state, local, and tribal governments.

Based on information from the bureau, CBO estimates that the bureau would spend between \$5 million and \$10 million to provide questionnaires in additional languages. According to the bureau, 1 percent of households cannot speak English or one of the five languages currently included on the alternative questionnaires. Although there would be relatively few questionnaires in additional languages, the cost per questionnaire would be significantly higher than the costs of questionnaires for the six languages currently included. The bureau would have to change their marketing materials to inform households of the alternative forms. Most languages other than Spanish and English must be transmitted to printers on film (rather than electronic file), so the printing process would be more expensive. Printing questionnaires in Braille would require special computer generated zinc plates.

Collecting data from questionnaires in additional languages also would be more expensive. The bureau plans to spend about \$600 million over the 1998-2000 period on automated data processing and telecommunications support. CBO expects the bureau would not construct automated systems to capture the data from the alternative forms, but instead, would translate

and manually enter the information into a database. CBO estimates that the bureau would spend between \$5 million and \$10 million to process questionnaires in 34 additional languages.

In addition to the costs cited above, H.R. 929 could affect spending by the Bureau of the Census in two other ways, but CBO cannot estimate their effects. First, the bureau would likely incur additional costs to process more duplicate questionnaires if forms in multiple languages are made available in community centers. Second, because H.R. 929 could increase the rate of response by mail, it could reduce the costs for having temporary employees telephoning or visiting households that did not respond to the questionnaire. The bureau estimates that a 1 percent increase in the response rate would save \$25 million. Hence, it is possible that implementing H.R. 929 could increase the mail response rate enough to offset part of the estimated \$10 million to \$20 million in costs; but CBO has no basis for estimating the bill's likely effect on the response rate.

The CBO staff contact is Mark Hadley. This estimate was approved by Paul N. Van de Water, Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.