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Report to Rep. Edward R. Roybal; by Allen R. Voss, Director, General Government Div.

Issue Area: Data Collected from Non-Federal Sources: Reliability and Accuracy of Information (3101).

Contact: General Government Div.

Budget Function: General Government: Other General Government (806).

Organization Concerned: Department of Commerce; Department of Labor; Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; Department of Agriculture; Office of Management and Budget.

Congressional Relevance: House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service. Rep. Edward R. Roybal.

Authority: Budget and Accounting Procedures Act of 1950, as amended (31 U.S.C. 18b). P.L. 94-311. Executive Order 12013. OMB Circular A-40. OFSPS Directive 15.

Federal agency efforts to implement P.L. 94-311 which mandates that executive branch agencies improve the collection and publication of statistics on the Nation's Hispanic population were reviewed. Of the agencies mentioned in the law, the Departments of Labor, Commerce, and Health, Education, and Welfare have adopted policies which will improve the statistical visibility of the Nation's Spanish-origin population. The Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics stated that, in addition to recent publications containing data on Hispanics, it will publish monthly nonseasonably adjusted labor force statistics on the national Hispanic population effective with the availability of January 1979 data. The Bureau of the Census is acting to give the Spanish origin population coverage in all statistical programs equal to that of blacks and whites. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare agencies have moved to develop statistics reflecting the mortality, natality, and social welfare conditions of the Spanish origin population. The Department of Agriculture has no plans to collect social statistics, but it does identify Hispanic participation in its programs. The Department of Commerce's Office of Federal Statistical Policy and Standards is the agency responsible for developing and coordinating Federal statistical policy. No instances have been found where funding was mentioned as a factor prohibiting agencies from implementing the provisions of P.L. 94-311. (RRS)

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**UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE**

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548



GENERAL GOVERNMENT  
DIVISION

8562

Release 12-13-78

B-159853

DECEMBER 7, 1978

The Honorable Edward R. Roybal  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Roybal:

In accordance with your June 13, 1978 letter, and subsequent discussions with your office, we have reviewed executive branch efforts to implement P.L. 94-311, which mandates that executive branch agencies improve the collection and publication of statistics on the Nation's Hispanic population. At your request we reviewed policies, activities, and plans made by several departments, and we examined the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB's) role in coordinating agency efforts to implement P.L. 94-311.

We interviewed officials and reviewed policies and other documents of the Office of Federal Statistical Policy and Standards and the Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce; the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor; the National Center for Health Statistics, and the Social Security Administration, Department of Health, Education and Welfare; and the Economics, Statistics, and Cooperatives Service, Department of Agriculture.

Our review showed that the principal statistical agencies in the executive branch have adopted policies, undertaken activities, and developed plans to provide better statistics on the Nation's Spanish origin population (Specific activities by agency are shown in apps. I to IV.) In addition, OMB's responsibility for coordinating and developing Government-wide statistical programs was transferred to the Department of Commerce, Office of Federal Statistical Policy and Standards.

Of the agencies mentioned in the law, the Departments of Labor; Commerce; and Health, Education, and Welfare have adopted policies which, in our opinion, will improve the statistical visibility of the Nation's Spanish origin population. The Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, for example, stated that, in addition to recent

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publications containing data on Hispanics, it will publish monthly nonseasonally adjusted labor force statistics on the national Spanish origin population effective with the availability of January 1979 data. The Department of Commerce's Bureau of the Census is acting to give the Spanish origin population coverage in all statistical programs equal to that of blacks and whites. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare agencies have moved to develop statistics reflecting the mortality, natality and social welfare conditions of the Spanish origin population. While much work remains to be done, the Department has applied resources to a Department-wide effort to implement P.L. 94-311.

The Department of Agriculture has no plans to collect social statistics; it does, however, identify Hispanic participation in its programs. The Department develops data on Hispanics participating in most of the Department's programs from administrative records. These data are published annually in the Department's Equal Opportunity Report. While officials claim that the Department's statistical activities are not of a socioeconomic nature as are those of other agencies specified in P.L. 94-311, but pertain to agricultural production, marketing, and trade, it is Department policy to identify Spanish origin in special studies or surveys.

The Department of Commerce's Office of Federal Statistical Policy and Standards is the agency responsible for developing and coordinating Federal statistical policy. These responsibilities, formerly carried out by the Statistical Policy Division of the Office of Management and Budget, were transferred to the Secretary of Commerce by the President (Executive Order No. 12013) in October 1977 under authority of the Budget and Accounting Procedures Act of 1950, as amended (31 U.S.C. 18b (1976)).

The Office of Federal Statistical Policy and Standards has issued a directive to standardize the reporting of race/ethnic statistics. Directive 15 (formerly Exhibit F, OMB Circular No. A-46) requires that by January 1, 1980, all Federal recordkeeping and reporting which involve the collection and presentation of racial and ethnic data use the following categories:

- American Indian or Alaskan Native.
- Asian or Pacific Islander.
- Black.
- White.
- Hispanic.

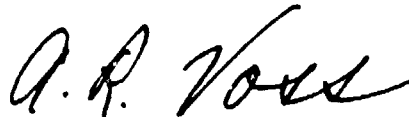
The Office is monitoring the use of these categories through participation in the forms clearance process. Existing forms submitted for extension and new and revised forms submitted for initial clearance are examined for compliance with the directive. While the race/ethnic classifications were developed in response to needs expressed by both the executive branch and the Congress rather than specifically to P.L. 94-311 requirements, their consistent use by all agencies should bring Federal statistical activities into compliance with the "collecting" requirements of P.L. 94-311.

We did not find any instances where funding was mentioned as a relevant factor prohibiting agencies from implementing the provisions of P.L. 94-311.

At your request, we did not obtain written agency comments on matters discussed in this report. We did, however, discuss the report contents with agency representatives and considered their comments in finalizing the report.

We plan no further distribution until 30 days from the date of this report unless you publicly announce its contents earlier. At that time we will send copies to interested parties and make copies available to others upon request.

Sincerely yours,



Allen R. Voss  
Director

BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

The Bureau of the Census has been working to improve its collecting and publishing of statistics on Americans of Spanish origin. These efforts are being directed primarily at the 1980 decennial census and the Current Population Survey.

Seeking a better count of the Spanish origin population in the 1980 Census of Population and Housing, the Census Bureau will include a Spanish origin question on all 1980 census forms and is acting to reduce the census undercount among the Spanish origin population. Steps intended to reduce the undercount include using indigenous Spanish-speaking enumerators, Spanish language questionnaires, community-based organizations to generate support for the census, and an extensive public relations and advertising campaign.

Since these undercount reduction efforts will not likely result in counting all persons of Spanish origin, the Bureau is developing a method for estimating the undercount of Hispanics in the 1980 census. Census undercounts are usually estimated from data collected in past censuses and from birth and death statistics. The Bureau, however, lacks adequate birth and death data on the Spanish origin population and therefore has had to seek an alternative method for estimating the Hispanic undercount in 1980. As a result of its undercount reduction and estimation efforts, the Bureau expects an improved count of the Spanish origin population in 1980 and has extensive plans to tabulate and publish the data collected.

In addition to the decennial census, the Census Bureau has improved the collection of Hispanic statistics in the Current Population Survey (CPS), its major source of intercensal information. The CPS is a monthly national survey which collects information on employment and labor force status and, in selected months, supplementary statistics on other characteristics of the population. To improve the reliability of data collected on the Spanish origin population, the Bureau has increased the number of Spanish origin households in the March CPS sample. This oversampling of Hispanic households has made it possible for the Bureau to publish Spanish origin data from the March CPS in detail similar to that for blacks.

CPS supplementary data are published in the Bureau's Current Population Reports. These reports, containing data on the Spanish origin population, are published annually or periodically and include the following titles:

- Persons of Spanish Origin in the United States.
- School Enrollment: Social and Economic Characteristics of Students.
- Fertility of American Women.
- Household and Family Characteristics.
- Marital Status and Living Arrangements.
- Geographic Mobility.
- Population Profile of the United States.
- Voting and Registration.
- Characteristics of the Population Below the Poverty Level.
- Money Income and Poverty Status of Families and Persons in the United States.

Other intercensal surveys from which the Census Bureau publishes statistics on Americans of Spanish origin are the Annual Housing Survey, the Census of Agriculture, and the Survey of Minority Businesses; a middecade census planned for 1985 will include a Spanish origin question. The Bureau also identifies Spanish origin in its data collection activities for other Federal agencies.

BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

Although the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has not accomplished all that it has planned, it has made progress in implementing its plans to comply with P.L. 94-311. BLS has issued 20 publications providing limited data on labor force characteristics of Hispanics including a comprehensive chartbook entitled *Workers of Spanish Origin*, which focuses on the social and economic characteristics of Hispanics. In addition, BLS publishes quarterly non-seasonally adjusted Hispanic labor force (employment and unemployment) statistics in its *Employment and Earnings* publication and in its *Labor Force Developments* press release.

BLS publishes less labor force statistics on Hispanics than on either whites or blacks. It identified sample size limitations of the Current Population Survey (CPS) as the principal reason for publishing fewer statistics on Hispanics. Since the present monthly CPS sample surveys such a relatively small number of Hispanics, the CPS does not (nor was it initially designed to) produce statistically reliable Hispanic labor force statistics. BLS said that to publish the same types of data on Hispanics that it publishes on blacks and whites under the current CPS sampling limitations would misrepresent the labor force status of Hispanics and would result in statistically unreliable numbers.

To date, BLS believes that it is making maximum use of the currently available data but realizes the Hispanic community's need for increased data publication. To address this need, BLS is planning to publish nonseasonally adjusted data on Hispanics on a monthly basis, as it does for blacks and whites, effective with the availability of January 1979 data. Although publishing nonseasonally adjusted data monthly will increase the frequency of labor force statistics available on Hispanics, BLS states that the data will be less reliable than that now published on a quarterly basis. BLS is concerned that, in publishing these statistics, inaccurate comparisons (i.e. comparing adjusted data to nonseasonally adjusted data) of the Hispanic employment situation will be made with that of other groups. Since policy decisions such as those concerning Federal assistance programs are made from these figures, this type of comparison could lead to inconsistent treatment of Hispanics.

BLS is attempting to develop seasonally adjusted CPS Hispanic labor force statistics that will meet its standards for statistical reliability. If successful, BLS will publish monthly and quarterly Hispanic statistics comparable

to those published for blacks and whites; thus far, however, it has been unsuccessful. According to BLS, the agency will publish adjusted Hispanic statistics as soon as the data meet reliability requirements, which BLS is relatively confident will be by 1980. Further, when the CPS is redesigned following the 1980 census, the increase in Hispanic households in the CPS sample should enable BLS to publish reliable Hispanic statistics in more detail.



SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

The Social Security Administration (SSA) is testing a revised application form for a social security number, Form SS-5, which includes a question to identify applicants of Spanish origin. When implemented, the form will enable SSA to produce improved statistics on Spanish origin beneficiaries and will provide information useful to other Federal agencies.

Using revised Form SS-5, SSA will eventually be capable of producing detailed statistics on Spanish origin beneficiaries of its Old Age Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs. Since Hispanic origin will be identified only for new social security number applicants, it will be a considerable time before SSA program statistics will be available for all, or nearly all, living persons of Spanish origin.

Collection of race/ethnic data from new social security claimants would provide data sooner, but OMB Circular A-40 prohibits SSA from including statistical questions not essential for determining program eligibility in benefit applications. Nevertheless, as data from the revised Form SS-5 applications become available, it will help determine the effects of SSA programs on Spanish origin beneficiaries. In addition, revised Form SS-5 will provide data on the Spanish origin population--independent of the decennial census--that the Census Bureau could use for estimating census undercounts of the Spanish origin population.

SSA presently develops data on Hispanic beneficiaries from nationwide sample surveys and from program records for five southwestern States. SSA uses Spanish surname files (a method unreliable elsewhere in the United States because of the presence of large numbers of other ethnic groups with similar surnames) to develop data approximating the number of Spanish origin OASDI and SSI beneficiaries in the Southwest. Persons of Spanish origin enrolled in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, which is administered by the States, are identified in a periodic sample survey of enrollment. These statistics and accompanying analyses of SSA program participation are published in the Social Security Bulletin and in other publications of the SSA Office of Research and Statistics.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR  
HEALTH STATISTICS

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) identifies Hispanics in all its major health-related surveys and also obtains Hispanic vital statistics data from some States. NCHS is also working to improve its Hispanic data collection efforts and those of State Vital Registration Systems which do not collect vital statistics on Hispanics. These efforts, if successful, will make it possible for NCHS to publish vital statistics on Hispanics.

Most NCHS health-related surveys collect Hispanic statistics and NCHS plans to do so in all surveys by January 1979. Publication of statistics on Hispanics from these surveys is presently limited because of poor statistical reliability. These surveys include the Health Interview Survey and the Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. They sample Hispanics and other minorities proportional to their distribution in the U.S. population as it appeared in 1970 census data. NCHS feels that the resultant small sample sizes for minorities in its surveys, with the exception of the National Survey of Family Growth which oversamples for blacks, yield data on minorities which cannot provide the same statistical reliability for minorities as for whites. Consequently, while NCHS publishes some data on individual minority groups, it usually assigns data to the categories of "whites" and "all others."

Obtaining vital statistics on Hispanics from State Vital Registration Systems has been difficult but relatively successful for NCHS. Since vital statistics collection is a State function, NCHS is totally dependent upon the States for data. Although NCHS pays all of the States for the data, the payment is only for the reproduction of the final records and does not cover the States' cost of collecting and processing the data. Consequently, the Center's limited influence over how or what data are collected means it must persuade the States to collect and supply the vital statistics that it needs.

Since 1976 NCHS has been working with the States, specifically those with large Hispanic populations, to collect data on Hispanic births and deaths. Presently birth certificates in 19 States and death certificates in 20 States identify Hispanics. (New Mexico identifies

Hispanic origin on death certificates only.) NCHS estimates that the data obtained from these States (based on 1970 census data) cover 59 percent of the national Hispanic births and 62 percent of the deaths. NCHS is currently working with Florida, Georgia, and Texas to identify Hispanics on birth and death certificates and with New Mexico for birth certificates. If this identification effort is successful, the addition of these States' statistics will increase the coverage of the national Hispanic population to 88 percent. NCHS expects to publish available vital statistics on the Spanish origin population in about a year.

Better identification of Hispanics on vital records is also important to other Federal information-collecting agencies. Improved coverage would provide data needed by the Bureau of the Census to better estimate census undercounts of the Spanish origin population and would allow the Social Security Administration to better evaluate and plan OASDI and SSI programs for possible effects of racial and ethnic differences in mortality.