

July 3, 2012

The Honorable Jeffrey Zients Acting Director Office of Management and Budget 725 17th Street Washington, DC 20006

Ms. Katherine Wallman U.S. Chief Statistician Office of Management and Budget 725 17th Street Washington, DC 20006

Dear Acting Director Zients and Ms. Wallman:

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the amendment that Congressman Scott Tipton (R-CO) offered to H.R. 5325, the Fiscal Year 2013 Energy and Water Appropriations Act. We believe the amendment jeopardizes the quality and efficiency of a wide range of surveys sponsored by the Federal government.

The members of AAPOR use many of the surveys the federal government conducts. Many AAPOR members are also heavily involved with conducting these surveys. We fully appreciate that it is critical that these surveys are statistically valid and representative of the populations they query. We agree with OMB that for many different types of surveys, incentives are not needed to complete a valid study. However, when applied appropriately, incentives significantly increases the accuracy, and thus the value, of federally sponsored surveys

The use of incentives on surveys is based on results from careful experimentation that has shown that they are a powerful way to improve a survey's quality and efficiency. In particular, incentives can:

- <u>Improve the response rate</u>. Incentives have been found to significantly increase the proportion of the sample that are willing to participate. This ensures that the sample is large enough to draw generalizations.
- <u>Improve response from hard to reach groups</u>. Incentives can get the attention of individuals who would normally not participate in the survey. This can significantly improve the quality of the survey measures by collecting measures from a wide range of individuals.
- <u>Increase efficiency</u>. Incentives reduce the amount of effort that is needed to find and follow-up respondents. For some surveys, this even **reduces** the overall cost of the survey.

Incentives include anything from a small cash token of appreciation to reimbursement for child care or transportation. A survey might involve coming to a central location so the subject can be examined by a doctor or be evaluated as part of a program. In other cases, small incentives are used to get an individual's attention about the topic of the survey. Once reading the study material, and understanding the legitimate goals of the study, many individuals are more likely to participate.

We are concerned that adoption of the amendment could severely hurt the quality of the surveys covered under the legislation. We are also troubled by language in Congressman Tipton's press release in which he expresses his intent "...to pursue legislative options to ban all federal agencies from including taxpayer dollars in surveys for the benefit of the responder."

We urge the Administration to include language in any message(s) it may release on HR 5325 about the potential implications of the Tipton amendment and to suggest an alternative route for addressing Congressman Tipton's concerns.

We look forward to working with the Administration on this matter.

Sincerely,

Paul J. Lavrakas, Ph.D. 2012-2013 President American Association for Public Opinion Research