**Opening Statement**

**Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)**

**Subcommittee on Government Operations**

**Hearing on Preparing for the 2020 Census: Will the Technology Be Ready?**

**Nov. 3, 2015**

Chairman Meadows, Chairman Hurd, and Ranking Member Kelly, today’s hearing is well timed given the recent release of the 2020 Census Operational Plan. At the midpoint of this decade, it is instructive to look at lessons learned from the last Census and preparations underway for the next. **The data derived from the Census provides a treasure trove of information to both the public and private sectors.** For the government, Census data provides the foundation for our representative system of governance, from Congress down to local school boards, and Census data is used to prudently and fairly allocate federal, state, and local dollars to the communities we represent. For businesses, this information helps to inform employment and capital investment decisions.

**The Census is one of the few government functions expressly mandated by the Constitution, and the advent of technology holds the promise of making this once-a-decade enumeration less arduous and less costly.** Of course, success will be largely dependent on the management and deployment of that technology. The Bureau’s botched attempt to deploy mobile, hand-held devices for the 2010 Census actually increased costs by $3 billion as additional workers had to be brought on at the last minute to process paper forms. The 2010 Census was 56% more costly than the 2000 Census. **Today, the Bureau is proposing to expand its use of technology, including new handheld devices, with the stated goal of lowering its latest estimated cost by nearly one-third.**

One of the newer initiatives that the Bureau believes will produce greater efficiencies and savings is the common-sense step of cross-referencing data from other federal and non-federal sources, such as the IRS or the U.S. Post Service, for example. A county-level test earlier this year showed using such records reduced the follow-up workload at homes known to be vacant by nearly 12 percent. In addition, the Bureau intends to expand use of modern technology. I hope to hear today what lessons from the 2010 experience with handheld devices are being applied to this new effort so as not to repeat past mistakes. I also am pleased to finally welcome the Census to the 21st century by offering an online response option. **In today’s high-tech, mobile society, people simply expect to be able to conduct business online, and, in many cases, in the palm of their hand on a smart device.**

I am encouraged by Mr. Cooper’s prepared remarks, in which he indicates the Bureau is on track to meet its goals. As the Commerce Department’s CIO, he is accountable for overseeing the Census Enterprise Data Collection and Processing (or CEDCaP) initiative, which will integrate and standardize systems and data sharing across the Bureau. I want to congratulate CIO Cooper on his efforts to implement the Federal IT Acquisition and Reform Act (or FITARA), which is guiding IT investments with enhanced risk assessments and performance metrics. Commerce has been a leader among federal agencies for embracing this new IT management model, which I co-authored with the former chairman of this committee, and I would welcome his insight on how it has helped improve preparations for the 2020 Census.

I also look forward to hearing responses from Mr. Cooper and Mr. Thompson, director of the Census Bureau, to concerns raised by the GAO that the Bureau is not moving quickly enough to achieve certain milestones. For example, the GAO has cited gaps in staffing and the deferral of key IT decisions, such as the scope of the IT infrastructure that will be necessary, cybersecurity protocols, and a procurement strategy for the handheld devices. These are important issues that must be resolved soon as the window of time in which the Bureau has to complete this transformation before end-to-end testing of the system is scheduled to begin in 2018 will close sooner than we think. As Mr. Cooper notes, however, the Bureau has delivered its Operational Plan three years earlier than it did for the 2010 Census, which hopefully allows us time to identify and address these gaps or shortfalls well in advance of that deadline.

Finally, let me address the elephant in the room, which is the urgency for Congress to adequately fund the Census. Providing robust oversight of its operations and these IT investments is laudable, but it is for naught if the Bureau does not have the resources with which to execute this monumental undertaking. **The initial budget proposal offered by House Republicans for fiscal year 2016 would have reduced funding for the Census by $374 million, or almost one-third, compared to the President’s request. I am optimistic that last week’s bipartisan budget agreement will allow us to restore those necessary investments. We cannot afford to shortchange an activity so fundamental to our democracy and the sustained well-being of our communities.**