



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
U.S. Census Bureau
Office of the Director
Washington, DC 20233-0001

March 22, 2021

The Honorable Edward J. Markey
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Markey:

Thank you for your inquiry regarding the U.S. Census Bureau's Pulse Surveys. The *Household Pulse Survey (HPS)* and the *Small Business Pulse Survey (SBPS)* together provide data to understand how individuals and businesses are withstanding the COVID-19 pandemic given business disruptions, stay-at-home orders, school closures, changes in the availability of consumer goods, and other abrupt and significant changes to American life.

We acknowledge your concern regarding the availability of timely data on utility and delivered fuels bills. Our HPS team reached out to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) to determine if they currently collect the data you requested. While their Residential Energy Consumption Survey (RECS) asks questions similar to those you requested, the timing of the RECS data releases would not be of benefit in informing about the decisions households may be making about their utilities in the current environment. In our discussion with EIA, the agency is also interested in more timely information about households' use of and ability to pay for utilities. As a result, we will begin working with EIA to incorporate this content into the HPS.

We are committed to updating the HPS questions to keep up with data needs while ensuring compliance with all Paperwork Reduction Act requirements. We are moving towards an established cycle of quarterly review to add or remove content based on evolving information needs. We just completed the revision cycle to launch the next phase of data collection beginning April 14, 2021. We will immediately initiate the next review cycle with new content targeted for inclusion in late June/early July 2021. We expect new questions developed in collaboration with EIA will be incorporated into the HPS at that time.

The HPS provides insight into how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting households across the country from a social and economic perspective. Data from this survey show the status of households' earnings, spending patterns, food and housing security, health, and education during the pandemic. The HPS was designed to supplement the ability of the federal statistical system to rapidly respond and provide salient information based on a high-quality sample frame, data integration, and cooperative expertise. The Census Bureau has engaged multiple Federal agencies to ensure the survey informs on the multiple ways in which households have been impacted by the pandemic, including the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Center for Health Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Housing and

Urban Development, the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Social Security Administration and others. [HPS data](#) are released every two weeks.

The Census Bureau also conducts the weekly SBPS to identify challenges faced by small businesses during the pandemic. Like the HPS, the SBPS data complements existing Census Bureau data collections by providing high-frequency, detailed information on the experiences of these businesses. SBPS data are available by sector, state, and for the fifty most populous Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA), giving local, state, and federal officials essential data to aid in policy and decision-making and assists researchers studying the effects of the pandemic. Businesses can also use the data as an aid when considering business related decisions. SBPS is laying the foundation and has proven the value of a high frequency statistical program to address the data needs during times of crisis or economic shocks. SBPS interactive data visualizations are available on the [SBPS webpage](#).

We appreciate your interest in these surveys as platforms for providing trusted Federal statistics on a near real-time, high-frequency basis. As the pandemic ultimately wanes, we look forward to finding ways to maintain this capability to provide timely data to meet the needs of Federal and state policymakers.

If you have any additional questions, please contact Mr. Angel Colón-Rivera, Chief, Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs, at 301 763-1298 or at cao@census.gov.

Sincerely,



Ron S. Jarmin
Acting Director

cc: Senator Patty Murray
Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley
Senator Jack Reed
Senator Bernard Sanders