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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 8, 2012

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The Honorable Paul Ryan
Chairman
Committee on the Budget
U.S. House of Representatives
207 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
Ranking Member
Committee on the Budget
U.S. House of Representatives
Room B-71 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Ryan and Ranking Member Van Hollen:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the difficulties the U.S. Insular Areas face regarding federal data collection efforts and how Congress can play a role in helping these efforts. The U.S. island territories lag far behind the states in terms of priority, availability, timeliness and types of data collection and the federal government has been slow in responding to the need to provide improvement and reform. This lack of information prevents federal and local governments from objectively measuring local activity and hinders effective planning. Sound policy depends on sound data and without accurate numbers on the economy, on employment, and on income levels, policymakers are less able to make informed decisions. It is difficult for governments and the public to know if policies are effective, when there is little or no objective numbers to measure against.

Federal government departments and agencies collect, compile, and often analyze data in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico concerning many aspects of state or local economies, workforces, and households. These data collection programs occur more frequently than the decennial census, and provide timely information of value to state and local governments and to the federal government when considering the allocation of resources to states and localities. For the most part, however, insular areas are not included in these data collection efforts. Insular areas, by virtue of their small and unsteady economies, limited local data collection and analyses resources, and modest financial means, would greatly benefit by federal collection and compilation of such data and, as members of the United States family, merit the same level of federal support in this regard as the states receive. Some federal data collection efforts include some, but not all, insular areas; other efforts simply exclude all insular areas. Federal funding for any data collection, compilation, or analysis programs applicable to the mainland should also include sufficient funding, and a mandate, for those efforts to extend to the insular areas.

The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics is "the principal Federal agency responsible for measuring labor market activity, working conditions, and price changes in the economy. Its mission is to collect, analyze, and disseminate essential economic information to support public and private decision-making." The Northern Mariana Islands, however, is not

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included in the BLS's state- or local-level data concerning employment, unemployment, pay and benefits, or workplace injuries. All of this data would be valuable not only to the Commonwealth government for its internal use, but also would assist public and private organizations in applying for federal grants.

Similarly, the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), a survey that provides data every year, gives communities the current information they need to properly plan investments and services, is not conducted in the insular areas. Data derived from the ACS help determine how more than \$400 billion in federal and state funds are distributed annually. Likewise, the Census Bureau's Small Area Income & Poverty Estimates program, designed to "provide updated estimates of income and poverty statistics for the administration of federal programs and the allocation of federal funds to local jurisdictions," omits the insular areas.

There is clearly a need for the insular areas to have the same type of data available to the states. Therefore, I respectfully request sufficient budgetary resources to provide for data collection in the U.S. insular areas equivalent and comparable to data collected by the agencies of the federal government for all other parts of the nation.

Sincerely,



GREGORIO KILILI CAMACHO SABLAN
Member of Congress