

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 9, 2021

Robert Fairweather
Acting Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th St NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Acting Director Fairweather:

I write to express my concern with the Recommendations from the Metropolitan and Metropolitan Statistical Area Standards Review Committee to the Office of Management and Budget Concerning Changes to the 2010 Standards for Delineating Metropolitan and Metropolitan Statistical Areas, which was recently noticed by the Office of Management and Budget. Of specific concern is the recommendation to increase the minimum population to qualify a metropolitan statistical area from 50,000 to 100,000. Adopting this recommendation could negatively impact over 140 metropolitan areas, as well as many micropolitan areas on the precipice of advancing to metropolitan area status upon release of the 2020 decennial census data, including the cities of Bismarck, Grand Forks, and Minot, North Dakota.

The designation of Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) are of particular importance to my communities, as they delineate the geographical areas in which the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) analyzes labor market conditions. These statistics help local government officials, businesses, real estate developers, and social service agencies review information about per capita income, spending patterns, unemployment rates, housing trends, and population movement. Further, MSAs and Micropolitan Statistical Areas (μ SA) are widely used as part of numerous federal government program funding formulas, such as Federal Transportation Planning Aid, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), and the HOME Investment Partnership Program, among others.

I urge you to reject the adoption of the proposed changes to increase the minimum population to qualify an MSA, and ask that you provide me with the following information:

1. What is the justification for increasing the minimum population to qualify an MSA from 50,000 to 100,000?
2. When making this determination, did OMB take into account all public and private sector nonstatistical uses that may be made of the MSA/micropolitan statistical area delineations? If not, why?
3. Has OMB conducted outreach to the appropriate committees of Congress as well as Senators and Members of Congress that represent the over 140 MSAs that would be impacted by an increase of the minimum population to qualify a MSA from 50,000 to 100,000? If not, why?
4. Has OMB shared with Members of Congress the impacts of this policy on the communities they represent? If not, why?
5. Has OMB notified and consulted with the over 140 MSAs that would be impacted by an increase of the minimum population to qualify as an MSA? If not, why?

6. Please provide a comprehensive list of government funding formulas and determinations that utilize MSA designations to establish applicant or beneficiary eligibility.

I look forward to your response, and to continuing to work with you to address the concerns of the communities in North Dakota that I represent.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Hoeven". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

John Hoeven
U.S. Senator