

February 11, 2025 – LinkedIn post by Ron Wasserstein, ASA Executive Director

With the reports of new Administration officials accessing sensitive data systems, I call upon policymakers in Congress and the White House to take all necessary actions to forbid any access to the data collected by the federal statistical agencies by individuals outside of those agencies.

Statistical agencies collect data under strict statutory protections, violations of which are felonies punishable by steep fines and prison terms that were established in the Privacy Act of 1974 and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2002, and reaffirmed in the Evidence Act that President Trump signed into law in January 2019. The purpose of such protections is, as stated by the Evidence Act, to fulfill the requirement that statistical agencies “protect the trust of information providers by ensuring the confidentiality and exclusive statistical use of their responses.” The law also requires the head of the host agency for the statistical agency (e.g., the Department of Labor for the Bureau of Labor Statistics) to “enable, support, and facilitate statistical agencies or units in carrying out” the confidentiality and other responsibilities of the statistical agencies.

Because the data collected by statistical agencies include sensitive personal and business information, the agencies have strict protocols and sophisticated protections that have proven, time-tested effectiveness to prevent any breaches of sensitive information.

Access to these data by individuals outside of the federal statistical agency violates federal law. More importantly, the American people’s trust in statistical agencies would be compromised by outside access to these data and even the ability to access these data and the perception thereof. Without this trust that has been earned and nurtured over decades, statistical agencies will not be able to collect the data needed to produce trusted, quality statistics. Because of survey-response, sample-size, and other challenges for almost all statistical agencies, many statistical products would be put at risk by outside access to statistical-agency data, including BLS’s monthly employment releases.

The White House should publicly reaffirm that confidential statistical information at federal statistical agencies will not be shared outside the agency to reassure the American people that they can trust these agencies with their information.