

Proposed Change to County Equivalents in Connecticut

What change is under consideration?

- The State of Connecticut requested that the Census Bureau adopt the State's nine Councils of Governments (which are designated under Section 16a-4a(4) of the Connecticut General Statutes) as the county-equivalent geographic unit for purposes of collecting, tabulating, and disseminating statistical data. The city- and town-based Councils of Governments (COGs) also serve as Planning Regions.

Why is Connecticut seeking this change?

- The nine COGs/Planning Regions are a more meaningful geographic area for statistical analysis and decision making at the sub-state level than the current counties.
- Connecticut's COGs/Planning Regions have the authority to carry out administrative functions that are typically found among counties in other states. Section 8-31b(b) of the Connecticut General Statutes states that
"Regional services provided to member municipalities shall be determined by each regional council of governments...and may include, without limitation, the following services: (1) Engineering; (2) inspectional and planning; (3) economic development; (4) public safety; (5) emergency management; (6) animal control; (7) land use management; (8) tourism promotion; (9) social; (10) health; (11) education; (12) data management; (13) regional sewerage; (14) housing; (15) computerized mapping; (16) household hazardous waste collection; (17) recycling; (18) public facility siting; (19) coordination of master planning; (20) vocational training and development; (21) solid waste disposal; (22) fire protection; (23) regional resource protection; (24) regional impact studies; and (25) transportation."
- Connecticut's General Statutes also authorize the COGs to "accept or participate in any grant, donation or program made available to counties by any other governmental or private entity."
- Adoption of COGs as county equivalents will make them eligible to apply for federal grant programs open to counties. Federal agencies tend to look to the Census Bureau for the inventory of, and boundaries for, counties and county equivalents.

Why should we consider implementing this change?

- The Census Bureau strives to provide statistical data for geographic areas that are meaningful and relevant to analysis and decision-making.
- Connecticut's current eight counties ceased to function as governmental and administrative entities in 1960.
- Connecticut's nine COGs/Planning Regions exist to address matters of mutual interest to, and coordinate activities for, their constituent cities and towns, with each city and town represented by its municipal chief elected official, and in that capacity can exercise a variety of responsibilities typically undertaken by counties in other states.
- While COGs do not have the authority to levy taxes, they are authorized under State law to assess dues on their member municipalities, to accept other sources of public and private assistance for the purpose of providing regional and shared services, and to administer a regional property tax base revenue sharing system if approved by a unanimous vote of its member municipalities.

- As such, the COGs/Planning Regions are more meaningful and relevant areas for tabulation and dissemination of statistical data within Connecticut as well as for regional and national county comparisons, than are the eight counties.

When do we propose implementing this change?

- The specific timing of implementation is under consideration.
- In presentations to various groups, we have proposed implementing this change in 2023, and use the new county equivalents when defining county-based geographic areas referenced to 2023 as well as reporting demographic and economic statistical data referenced to 2023 and all years thereafter.
- A 2023 implementation would also facilitate use of the COGs/Planning Regions with data from the 2022 Economic Census and 2022 Census of Agriculture.

What do we need to know to decide whether to implement this change and when?

- We have been meeting with various groups across the federal government, and also will issue a *Federal Register* Notice, to gather information and comments related to the impact that adoption of COGs/Planning Regions as county equivalents might have on data tabulation and dissemination, data analysis (comparability over time; longitudinal analysis), planning and decision making, and program implementation; specifically,
 - Are there data collection and tabulation programs or nonstatistical programs that will not be able to implement this change?
 - Will the proposed change in county equivalents pose such a substantial break in data continuity that longitudinal analyses are not possible?
 - Are there disclosure avoidance issues and concerns that would make implementing the change difficult or not advisable?
 - Are there specific programs and other uses of county-level information in which continued reference to the more familiar current counties is advisable and preferred?

What concerns have been expressed regarding the proposed change?

- Systems will need to change to recognize the new county equivalents.
 - Note that systems have had to change in the past as a result of creation of new counties, or dissolution of counties, in various states.
- The proposed change would create a break in comparability of data.
 - The longitudinal consistency of county-level statistics for Connecticut will be affected. The statistics will either have a break in the time series where the old counties end and the new counties begin; or the reliability of older statistics will be affected as they will need to be statistically adjusted to convert the old counties to the new county equivalents.
 - Modeled estimates may address this concern, but agencies and data users may need guidance and support in producing models.
 - The Census Bureau's Geography Division will produce files cross-walking cities and towns from the old counties to the new county equivalents to facilitate data aggregation and comparability.
- Geographic areas, such as metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas, that are delineated based on counties will change, creating comparability issues with metropolitan and micropolitan areas of the past.

