

May 19, 2020

The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith
Chair, Subcommittee on Legislative Branch
Senate Appropriations Committee
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chris Murphy
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Legislative Branch
Senate Appropriations Committee
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Hyde-Smith, Ranking Member Murphy and Members of the U.S. Senate Appropriations Legislative Branch Subcommittee:

The undersigned organizations write you to urge the U.S. Senate to establish a Senate Office on Diversity and Inclusion and fund it adequately to operate in an independent and non-partisan manner.

Our organizations believe that a strong and effective Congress is essential to the functioning of American democracy. Congress works best when its workforce reflects the full diversity of backgrounds and talents that Americans possess. To ensure its progress toward inclusivity, it is time for the Senate to show commitment and establish an Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

Inclusion Helps Legislatures Function Effectively

Congressional staff provides indispensable assistance and irreplaceable institutional knowledge that legislators need to meet their policymaking, oversight, and constituent service responsibilities. As the Congressional Management Foundation notes, “talented and experienced employees are the most valuable assets in any knowledge-based workplace, and Congress is one of the most important, complex and information-rich knowledge-based workplaces in the world.”

Extensive research has shown that teams of capable, intelligent people with diverse personal characteristics work better than homogenous groups. For example, social scientists have observed that when people of varied backgrounds work together, they surpass groups with similar personal characteristics in recognizing broad ranges of needs and opportunities, brainstorming, and generating creative solutions to emerging problems.

Emerging research also provides increasingly direct and conclusive proof that inclusive teams make Members more effective policymakers. A 2018 study of Congressional committees’ work determined that the more racially diverse the members of a committee were, the less likely it was that that the committee’s reports and other written products would include minority or dissenting views. According to this study’s author, diverse perspectives help build legislative consensus, and therefore “efforts underway to further increase diversity in Congress are important in potentially contributing to a better functioning legislature.”

In addition to positively influencing the speed and effectiveness of policymaking, inclusive legislative staff teams enhance Congress’s legitimacy in the eyes of its constituents. Researchers have found that constituents tend to trust and engage more with their representatives when those elected officials are individuals who share the experiences of constituents’ racial or ethnic communities.

This suggests that inclusive staffing will also tend to strengthen democracy by increasing voter participation and other civic activity. Staff who reflect the diversity of Members’ constituencies also are ideally equipped to anticipate and effectively address those constituents’ concerns.

Congress has much to gain from taking action on a public commitment to inclusive hiring. As the partisan conflict has intensified, Congress has found itself in ever more acute need of people who are willing and able to work together across dividing lines. Congress must improve its ability to reach consensus by deliberately pursuing greater inclusivity in staffing.

Congress Has Fallen Short on Inclusivity

Members of Congress and the workforce that powers the legislative branch do not yet reflect the diversity of the constituents for whom they work. Congress works to ensure that federal agencies and private employers make inclusion a priority, but it has not yet held itself accountable in the same way. Congress must take concrete steps and remain open to new administrative approaches to make progress and demonstrate a meaningful commitment to diversity to its constituents.

Although there are few data available from official sources, available indicators universally show that the Congressional workforce is not representative of the population for which it works. In its 2015 report on Senate staff, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies found that while 37.9 percent of United States residents were people of color, just 7.1 percent of Senate Chiefs of Staff, Legislative Directors, Communications Directors, and Staff Directors were people of color. Congress can take effective action to address these disparities. For example, since initiating annual surveys, creating an inclusive resume bank, and urging Member offices to adopt policies like the Rooney Rule, the Senate Democratic Caucus has measured incremental and consistent improvement in markers of inclusive hiring. It is essential that Congress make an explicit and active commitment to building a workforce that more closely resembles the nation's broad diversity.

House Office of Diversity and Inclusion

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a Rules package that established the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion in 2019, a significant step toward increasing staff diversity and inclusion in the House of Representatives. In addition to establishing the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the Rules package required the appointment of a Chief Diversity Officer and the development of a diversity plan, to include a survey to evaluate diversity in House offices and policies to direct and guide House offices to recruit, hire, train, develop, advance, promote, and retain a diverse workforce.

The House of Representatives administered the required diversity survey in the summer of 2019, and the responses will be incorporated into a series of recommendations to help enhance diversity and inclusion across the chamber. In March 2020, the House of Representatives appointed a Chief Diversity Officer to lead the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and it will add a Deputy Director to address effective and inclusive hiring in a bipartisan manner.

The bipartisan Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress unanimously endorsed the efforts of the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and the full House overwhelmingly adopted House Resolution 756, which charged the Office with submitting reports for the foreseeable future and anticipates its findings.

Senate Office of Diversity and Inclusion

We urge the U.S. Senate to establish a Senate Office of Diversity and Inclusion, appoint a Senate Office of Diversity and Inclusion Director, and prepare a Senate Inclusion Report. The Senate must address the task of diversifying its workforce and over the long term, become a more attractive workplace that is as creative and effective as it could be.

Employers across the nation in both large and small enterprises increasingly implement inclusive hiring practices because they ensure a workforce that is representative of their communities, and they generate efficiency, innovation, and other strategic advantages. The United States Senate should attract the best

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and should be proactive and transparent about diversity, and implement strategies that address fair employment opportunities for individuals of diverse races, ethnicities, religions, genders, disabilities, and veteran status.

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Conclusion

NALEO Educational Fund and the undersigned organizations urge the creation of the United States Senate Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and we look forward to working with Senators to implement measures that make future Congresses more representative and more effective as public servants. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Thank you for your consideration, with best regards,

Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APAICS)

College to Congress

Demand Progress

Democracy Fund Voice

Issue One

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

NALEO Educational Fund

Pay Our Interns Action Fund

cc: Congressional Hispanic Caucus
Congressional Hispanic Conference
Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer