

**Testimony Concerning the Creation of a Senate Office of Diversity and Inclusion,
Prepared by Demand Progress, the National Association of Latino Elected and
Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund, and the Joint Center for Political
and Economic Studies, for the Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee
for FY 2023**

Dear Chair Reed, Ranking Member Braun, and Members of the Legislative Branch
Appropriations Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony concerning our request for the creation of a Senate Office of Diversity and Inclusion. We are a cross-partisan coalition of organizations concerned about strengthening the diversity of staff that support the work of the United States Senate.

When the 117th Congress was sworn in, it made history as the most diverse congressional class our nation has ever seen. Despite this historic moment in our country's history, top Senate staffers do not often reflect the makeup of the constituencies they serve, including staffers of racial and ethnic minority groups, veterans, and people with disabilities. An August 2020 report from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies revealed that people of color account for nearly 40 percent of the population of the United States, but only 11 percent of top Senate personal office staff.¹

This shortfall reflects a fundamental problem our government has with ensuring that the full spectrum of America's backgrounds and experiences is represented by congressional staff. These discrepancies are particularly troublesome in the wake of an increasing number of elections that continue to produce diverse congressional makeup. In addition, research has found that inclusive staffing is associated with many positive benefits, including creativity, innovation, objectivity, productivity and positive working environments.²

Congressional staff provide indispensable assistance and irreplaceable institutional knowledge to senators as they conduct their legislative, oversight, and constituent services duties. Nevertheless, low staff pay is a barrier to entry into the senatorial hiring pipeline, inadvertently

¹ See, "Racial Diversity Among Top Staff In Senate Personal Offices" p. 2. The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (August 2020).

https://jointcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-Senate-Report-Draft_08-21-20-5AM.pdf

² ; Dutton, Jane E. and Robert B. Duncan, "Strategic Issue Diagnosis and Creation of Momentum for Change." Strategic Management Journal 8, no. 3 (1987): 279-295; Wiersma, Margarethe F. and Karen A. Bantel, "Top Management Team Demography and Corporate Strategic Change." The Academy of Management Journal 35, no. 1 (March 1992): 91-121; Maddock, Su. "Change You Can Believe In: The Leadership of Innovation." The Whitehall Innovation Hub, Sunningdale Institute, National School of Government. (April 2009) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264541467_Change_you_can_believe_in_the_leadership_of_innovation

biasing the hiring pool towards those individuals with sufficient financial resources to supplement their salaries. In addition, low pay creates incentives for experienced staff to depart the Senate to the Executive branch and private sector, which have significantly higher average salaries. These two factors, working in tandem, impact staff diversity.

In 2019, the House of Representatives took a major step toward addressing diversity and created its Office of Diversity and Inclusion (OD&I) in its Rules package at the start of the 116th Congress,³ which may serve as a useful model for the Senate. House Rules required the OD&I to develop a diversity plan,⁴ which addresses:

- (1) policies to direct and guide House offices to recruit, hire, train, develop, advance, promote and retain a diverse workforce;
- (2) the development of a survey to evaluate diversity in House offices;
- (3) a framework for the House of Representatives diversity report; and
- (4) a proposal for the composition of an Advisory Council to inform the work of the Office.

House Rules also require the OD&I to submit an annual demographic and diversity report. The study involves surveying House staffers to determine their demographic characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, military status), and analyze how demographic diversity within the House of Representatives compares to that of private sector organizations and the broader federal government. Furthermore, the OD&I proposed it oversee the undertaking of the House's annual compensation and diversity study, in part to record staff job satisfaction, benefits and compensation satisfaction, and perceptions of their workplace diversity climate. These suggestions are reasonable, and we commend them to you.

The purpose of gathering and publishing this information on staff diversity is to strengthen the pipeline of capable and diverse staff hired and retained by the Senate by providing information about the current state of play. This will let us know how the Senate is doing as an institution and suggest where further improvements can be made. It is not intended to draw public attention to the operations of any particular office, nor should it intrude upon the privacy of any individual.

We urge the committee to appropriate funds for the creation of its own OD&I Office. The House established the OD&I as an independent office, reporting directly to the authorizing committee, and has seen immense success in its operations and information gathering. We do not have a perspective on where to situate a Senate OD&I, although there is value in having it be more

³ See, H. Res 6 (116th), section 104(d) (p. 40), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-116hres6eh/pdf/BILLS-116hres6eh.pdf>

⁴ See, *Section by Section Analysis of H. Res 6* (116th Congress), House Rules Committee p. 11 at <https://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20181231/116-HRes6-SxS-U1.pdf>

visible and independent because that would assist with its mission of supporting the hiring and retention of capable, expert, diverse staff.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the committee.