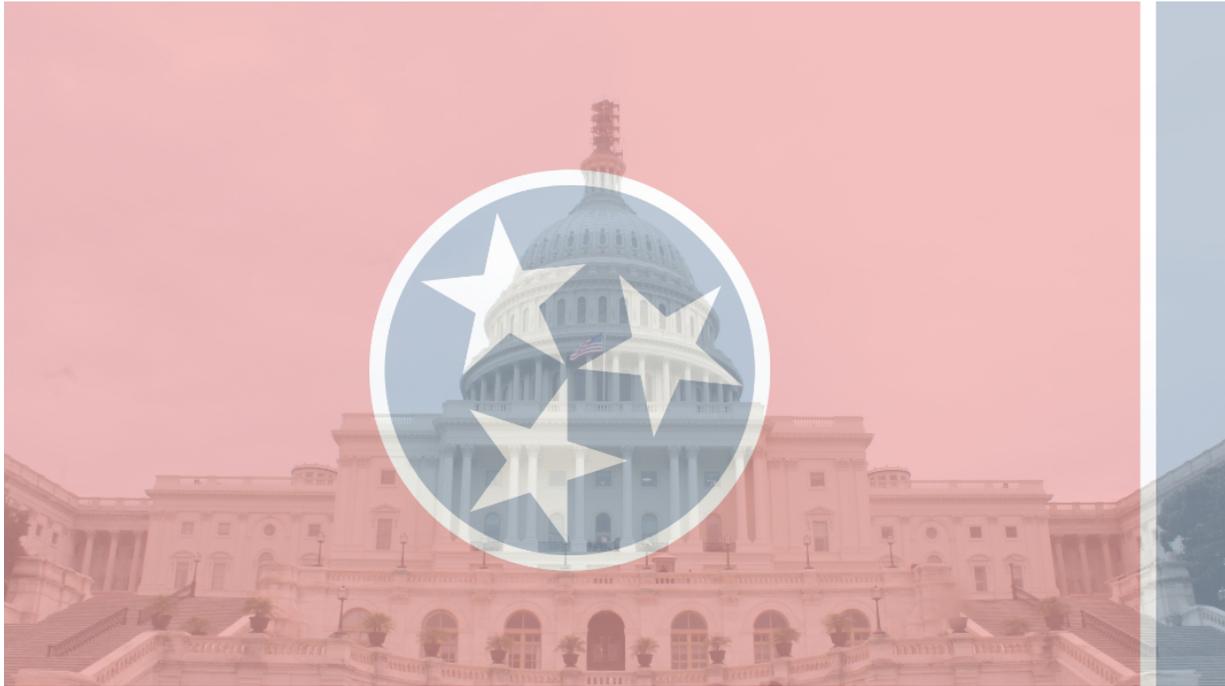




**JOINT CENTER**  
FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STUDIES



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**RACIAL DIVERSITY AMONG TOP STAFF OF THE  
TENNESSEE CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION**

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# Executive Summary

This report examines the racial diversity among the 28 top staffers of the U.S. House and U.S. Senate Members who represent Tennessee. This report defines top staff (or “key” or “senior” staff) to include: chiefs of staff, legislative directors, and communications directors in Washington, D.C. personal offices; and staff directors assigned to full committees. The data reflect employment on June 1, 2018. Key findings show:

- People of color account for over a quarter (25.3 percent) of Tennessee’s population, but they account for none (0 percent) of the 28 top staffers who work for the U.S. House and U.S. Senate Members who represent Tennessee.
- Although congressional top staff nationwide is less diverse than the U.S. population, Tennessee’s lack of diversity among top staff is particularly striking. The Joint Center’s previous studies found that people of color accounted for 38 percent of the U.S. population, just under 14 percent of top staff in the U.S. House nationwide, and just over 7 percent of top staff in the U.S. Senate nationwide.
- African Americans accounted for 46 percent of the Democratic Party’s voters in Tennessee in 2016, but they account for none of the six top staffers who work for the Democratic Members of the Tennessee congressional delegation. By comparison, African Americans were 2 percent of the Republican Party’s voters and none of 22 top staffers who work for Republican Members.
- Across the nation, 313 U.S. House districts are represented by Members with no top staff of color. This includes Congressman Steve Cohen’s district (TN-9), which has the sixth highest percentage of residents of color (75.7 percent) and no top staff of color.
- Mid-level staff positions are important “feeder” positions for top staff positions. In the U.S. Senate offices that represent Tennessee, less than 4 percent of the mid-level staffers are people of color.
- Just over 28 percent of the Tennessee congressional delegation’s top staffers are women.

**Table 1: Top Staff Diversity in Washington, D.C. Personal and Full Committee Offices of Tennessee U.S. House & Senate Members (in percentages and raw numbers)**

Race	Percentage of Tennessee Population	Percentage of Top U.S. House & Senate Staff	Number of Top U.S. House & Senate Staff
White	73.3	100	28
African American	16.5	0	0
Latina/o	4.9	0	0
Asian American/Pacific Islander	1.6	0	0
Native American	0.3	0	0
Bi/Multiracial	2.0	0	0
TOTAL	98.6	100	28

Note: 1.4 percent of Tennessee's population is listed as “some other race alone” according to the 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

# Introduction

This study analyzes the racial diversity of top staff in Washington, D.C. who work for the U.S. House Members and U.S. Senators who represent Tennessee.

Hiring top staffers of color is not an act of charity. It is the right thing to do, and it results in better public policy. Diverse top staffers allow a Member to understand her or his constituents and effectively represent them in Congress. Economic and sociological studies demonstrate that diverse work teams lead to greater productivity, help organizations establish trust with their clients, and help organizations make more innovative decisions.<sup>1</sup> Diversity among top staff would also facilitate diversity in other sectors in Tennessee and elsewhere, because top staff positions are pathways to other high-ranking positions in government, the private sector, and the nonprofit sector.

Unfortunately, although people of color account for 25.3 percent of Tennessee’s population,<sup>2</sup> the Tennessee congressional delegation has no top staff of color.

## The Positions Analyzed in This Report

Members in both the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate each have a “personal office” in Washington, D.C. that helps them represent their state or district, and most Members have three top positions in their personal offices: chief of staff, legislative director, and communications director. In addition, Members serve on committees and oversee committee staff. Each full committee is led by a Chair who is a Member of the majority party, and most committees have a majority staff director who works under the Chair. The minority party’s committee Members are led by a Ranking Member, who generally oversees a minority staff director.

Like the Joint Center’s previous studies, this report focuses on full committee staff directors and the top three personal office positions: chief of staff, legislative director, and communications director. The structure of each office varies, but these positions are the most consistent throughout each office, and they provide a comprehensive assessment of top staff diversity.

Persons holding these positions are invested with hiring and firing powers, and they are given immense latitude in legislative and policy development. Collectively, these top staff manage a federal budget of over \$4 trillion and provide oversight of hundreds of government agencies with over 3 million civilian and military employees. Top staff often are the public face of the

office, meeting with Members, staffers, lobbyists, constituents, the media, and members of the public. Top staff in the U.S. Senate also manage the confirmation process for commissioners, judges, ambassadors, and other appointees.

While some Members deem their state directors and district directors as top staff, this report focuses on top staff diversity in Washington, D.C. offices. Top staff in Washington, D.C. are often less visible to constituents in Tennessee than state staff. In addition, top staff in Washington, D.C. often engage more directly with other congressional offices nationwide in negotiating federal legislation, appropriations, agency oversight, and the confirmation process. Recognizing that in some offices the state director is a “feeder” position to becoming chief of staff, this report analyzes the diversity of state directors along with U.S. Senate mid-level positions in Table 7.

Even though this report focuses on top staff in both chambers and contains a section on mid-level “feeder” positions in the U.S. Senate (see “The Pipeline: Racial Diversity Among Mid-Level Senate Staff”), people of color are employed in other positions that make significant contributions to congressional offices. This report, however, highlights a crucial issue—that few people of color hold senior-level positions. While there may be influential individual staffers of color who are not calculated in the data because their titles are not included in our analysis, this fact should not deflect from the larger insight that the top staff positions examined in this report do not reflect the racial diversity of Tennessee. This is a structural challenge for the entire Tennessee delegation and the institution of Congress as a whole, rather than a problem attributable to a single Member or a single political party.

## Methodology

The Census Bureau defines *race* as a person’s self-identification with one or more social groups. This report contains five racial categories: White, African American, Latina/o, Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI), and Native American. The terms *African American* and *Black* are used interchangeably throughout the report. The report also includes a category for staffers who identify as biracial or multiracial to ensure that each individual is accurately represented.

To identify staff initially, the authors used LegiStorm, a database that contains the most comprehensive and accurate biographical and contact data for each Member and congressional staffer. Data reflect employment in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate on June 1, 2018.

To initially identify the race of each staffer, the authors used photographs from LegiStorm and visited social networking sites—such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter—listed for each staffer. The

authors also reviewed Roll Call, constituent photographs, news clippings, and press releases. LegiStorm’s database includes the gender of each staffer.

Researchers emailed the data that the authors collected to staffers in each personal and committee office to provide an opportunity for both the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate to correct any errors. The email listed all identified top staff of color by name and position in the office (or indicated that the data showed that the office had no top staff of color). The email asked the recipients to reply and correct any errors. Offices that did not respond were emailed at least two more times and given an opportunity to correct the data. Emails sent to the U.S. Senate also included data on mid-level “feeder” positions (defined below in the section entitled “The Pipeline: Racial Diversity Among Mid-Level Senate Staff”).

The authors provided additional opportunities to congressional staffers to correct the data. In the U.S. Senate, for example, a paper letter was hand delivered to each office providing an opportunity to reply. Also, the Asian American/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, and Native American staff associations sent relevant parts of the data to their members who work as staffers in the Senate. For example, the Senate Black Legislative Staff Caucus sent data on Black top and mid-level staff to their members who work in the Senate and asked whether anyone was missing (only one mid-level staffer from Tennessee was on that list). In the U.S. House, the authors took additional steps, which are outlined in the Joint Center’s September 2018 report *Diversity Among Top U.S. House Staff*.<sup>3</sup>

After this entire process, the researchers lacked racial information for 6 of the 82 top and mid-level staffers in Tennessee (7 percent). For the purposes of calculating racial diversity, this report classifies these 6 staffers as White.

Due to rounding, total percentages presented throughout this document may not add up to 100 percent precisely.

# Personal & Full Committee Office Diversity

This section analyzes each of the top staffers who work for Tennessee congressional Members in Washington, D.C. personal offices (chief of staff, legislative director, and communications director) and full committees (staff director).

To avoid double counting, we categorized Senator Lamar Alexander’s personal office chief of staff as a staff director because he also serves as staff director of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee (chaired by Senator Alexander). The staff director of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee (chaired by Representative Phil Roe) is the second staff director included in Table 2. Although Senator Bob Corker chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he does not have a staff director and thus this position not reflected in Table 2. As indicated below in Table 7, none of the other staff of Senator Corker’s Foreign Relations Committee who have significant administrative, policy, or communications responsibilities are people of color.

Senator Alexander has both a senior communications director and a communications director in his personal office, and we included both of these positions in the analysis below.

Of the 28 staffers who serve as full committee staff directors and personal office chiefs of staff, legislative directors, and communications directors for the U.S. House and U.S. Senate Members representing Tennessee, none (0 percent) are people of color. This is significantly less than the 25.3 percent of Tennessee’s population who identify as people of color.

**Table 2: Top Staff Diversity in Washington, D.C. Personal and Full Committee Offices of Tennessee U.S. House & Senate Members by Position (in raw numbers)**

Race	Chief of Staff	Legislative Director	Communications Director	Staff Director
White	10	10	6	2
African American	0	0	0	0
Latina/o	0	0	0	0
Asian American/Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0
Native American	0	0	0	0
Bi/Multiracial	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	10	10	6	2

# House vs. Senate Top Staff Diversity

Nationwide, the U.S. House has more top staff of color than the U.S. Senate, but in Tennessee, both chambers lack racial diversity among top staff. The Joint Center’s 2015 Senate and 2018 House reports found that people of color accounted for just over 7 percent of top staff in the U.S. Senate and less than 14 percent of top staff in the U.S. House.<sup>4</sup> In Tennessee, however, no top staff of color work for U.S. House or U.S. Senate Members.

**Table 3: Racial Representation of Tennessee U.S. House Top Staff and Tennessee U.S. Senate Top Staff (in percentages)**

Race	Tennessee Population	Tennessee U.S. House Top Staff	Tennessee U.S. Senate Top Staff
White	73.3	100	100
African American	16.5	0	0
Latina/o	4.9	0	0
Asian American/Pacific Islander	1.6	0	0
Native American	0.3	0	0
Bi/Multiracial	2.0	0	0
TOTAL	98.6	100	100

Note: 1.4 percent of Tennessee's population is listed as “some other race alone” according to the 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

# Political Party Diversity

Of the top staff in the Tennessee congressional delegation, 22 work for Republicans and 6 work for Democrats. None are people of color.

By comparison, data from the Joint Center’s past reports showed that people of color accounted for 6.7 percent of all Republican Senate top staff nationwide, 4.4 percent of Republican House top staff, 8.1 percent of Democratic Senate top staff, and 24.6 percent of Democratic House top staff.

**Table 4: Racial Representation of U.S. House and U.S. Senate Top Staff Representing Tennessee by Political Party (by raw numbers)**

Race	Republican	Democratic
White	22	6
African American	0	0
Latina/o	0	0
Asian American/Pacific Islander	0	0
Native American	0	0
Bi/Multiracial	0	0
TOTAL	22	6

While African Americans made up 46 percent of the total Democratic Party turnout in Tennessee in 2016, they held none of the 6 top staff positions in the offices of the two Democratic U.S. House Members from Tennessee, Steve Cohen (District 9) and Jim Cooper (District 5). In District 9—which includes Memphis—African Americans accounted for 64.7 percent of all residents and 82 percent of Democratic Party 2016 turnout. In District 5—which includes Nashville—African Americans accounted for 24.3 percent of all residents and 39 percent of Democratic Party 2016 turnout.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 5: Racial Representation of Top U.S. House and U.S. Senate Staff Compared with Tennessee Party 2016 Turnout**

Race	% of Total Republican Party Turnout in Tennessee in 2016	% of Tennessee Republican U.S. House & Senate Top Staff	% of Total Democratic Party Turnout in Tennessee in 2016	% of Tennessee Democratic U.S. House & Senate Top Staff
White	98	100	52	100
African American	2	0	46	0
Latina/o	0	0	1	0
Asian American/Pacific Islander	0	0	1	0
Native American	0	0	0	0
Bi/Multiracial	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Note: Percentage of Party Turnout in Tennessee in 2016 data was provided by [BlueLabs](#), an analytics and technology company.

The heavy reliance of Black votes may be a compelling reason to enhance top staff diversity among Democratic Members, but voting performance should not be an excuse for Republican Members in Tennessee to disregard racial diversity or to believe it is impossible to find top staff of color. The Joint Center’s 2015 report found that Republican U.S. Senators nationwide had more Black top staff than Democratic U.S. Senators. In the U.S. House, White Republican Members have more chiefs of staff of color than do White Democrats, and Speaker Paul Ryan has a Black chief of staff of his leadership office.<sup>6</sup>

# Racial Diversity Among Top Staff

Table 6 details the racial demographics of the area represented by each Member of the Tennessee delegation and the top staff who work for each Member. Of the 313 U.S. House Members nationwide who have no top staff of color, only five represent districts with a higher percentage of non-White residents than Congressman Steve Cohen’s district (TN-9).<sup>7</sup>

**Table 6: Comparison of Top Staff to Population Represented by Member**

Member	District	% Non-White Residents	% Non-White Top Staff
Rep. Cohen-D	TN-9	75.7%	0%
Rep. Cooper-D	TN-5	39.9%	0%
Rep. Kustoff-R	TN-8	27.3%	0%
Sen. Alexander-R	Statewide	25.3%	0%
Sen. Corker-R	Statewide	25.3%	0%
Rep. Blackburn-R	TN-7	19.5%	0%
Rep. DesJarlais-R	TN-4	19.3%	0%
Rep. Fleischmann-R	TN-3	17.9%	0%
Rep. Duncan, Jr.-R	TN-2	13.8%	0%
Rep. Black-D	TN-6	11.5%	0%
Rep. Roe-R	TN-1	8.4%	0%

# The Pipeline: Racial Diversity Among Mid-Level Senate Staff

The diversity of mid-level “feeder” staff positions provides one indicator to predict future diversity among top staff. An examination of current mid-level staff provides a rough snapshot of part of the pool of talent that is currently gaining the relevant experiences and developing the relationships needed for promotion to top staff in the future.

The data in Table 7 reflect the racial diversity of staff in significant mid-level administrative, policy, and communications positions who work for U.S. Senators Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker. Senator Alexander oversees mid-level staff in his personal office, as Chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, and as Chair of the Energy and Water Development Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Senator Corker oversees mid-level staff in his personal office and as Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Resource constraints limited the analysis of “feeder” positions to the two U.S. Senators, but future Joint Center research may include an analysis of feeder positions in the U.S. House.

For the purposes of Table 7, “mid-level” positions include:

- Staff in the Washington, D.C. personal offices with the following titles: deputy chief of staff, administrative director, deputy legislative director, legislative assistant or equivalent (e.g., counsel, senior counsel, general counsel, chief counsel, special counsel, policy advisor), deputy communications director, or press secretary.
- State director, because this position serves as a “feeder” position to chief of staff in some offices.
- Subcommittee staff directors and full committee or subcommittee staff who work under either Senator Corker or Senator Alexander with the following titles: chief clerk, deputy chief clerk, deputy staff director, policy director, communications director, deputy communications director, general counsel, deputy general counsel, senior policy advisor, policy advisor, budget director, or professional staff member.

**Table 7: The Pipeline: Racial Representation of Tennessee U.S. Senate Mid-Level Staff (in raw numbers and percentages)**

Race	Sen. Alexander Raw Number	Sen. Alexander Percentage	Sen. Corker Raw Number	Sen. Corker Percentage
White	30	93.5	21	100
African American	1	3.2	0	0
Latina/o	0	0	0	0
Asian American/Pacific Islander	1	3.2	0	0
Native American	0	0	0	0
Bi/Multiracial	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	32	99.9	21	100

# Gender Among Top Staff

Although there are no men or women of color among top staffers who work for the Tennessee congressional delegation, there are some White women. Of the 28 top staffers who work for Members from Tennessee, 8 are women. A majority of women who are top staffers work for just two of Tennessee’s 11 Members: Senator Lamar Alexander (three women top staffers) and Representative Jim Cooper (two women top staffers). Of the top staff of the remaining 9 Members of the Tennessee delegation, only 14.3 percent are women.

**Table 8: Percentage of Top Staff of U.S. House and Senate Members from Tennessee Who Are Women**

Tennessee Members...	Women Top Staffers
U.S. House & Senate combined	28.6
U.S. House Only	19
U.S. Senate Only	57.1
Republicans	22.7
Democrats	50

# Recommendations

No single solution to the lack of racial diversity among top staff of Tennessee’s congressional delegation is sufficient. Change requires a clear commitment, strategic implementation, and monitoring of progress by Members. Individual U.S. House and U.S. Senate Members can take several steps to improve and maintain diversity in their offices:

- **Develop a written office diversity plan**, just as an office develops its own budget. The plan should include recruitment and hiring goals, as well as strategies that will be employed to retain people of color once they are hired. Existing staff should be tasked with implementing the plan, and Members should monitor and evaluate the performance of individual staff members and the office as a whole.
- **Track and annually disclose staff office demographic data.** It is difficult to fix a problem that goes unmeasured. Congress requires this disclosure from many federal agencies, government contractors, and other work organizations. Members of Congress should measure this same data and disclose it to their constituents.<sup>8</sup>
- **Adopt a version of the National Football League’s “Rooney Rule,”** which requires that an office interview at least one candidate of color for each vacant senior position.
- **Recruit diverse interns from Tennessee, and pay them.** Unpaid internships often limit internship opportunities to young people from affluent families, and that creates a pool of talent for entry-level positions that does not reflect the diversity of Tennessee. This entry-level pool eventually shapes the talent pool for mid-level and top staff positions. Members should also recruit interns and fellows from the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APAICS), the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (CBCF), INSIGHT America, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI), the Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute (CHLI), and the GW Native American Political Leadership Program (NAPLP).
- **Build a diverse pipeline of mid-level staff.** Ensure robust diversity among legislative assistants, counsel, press secretaries, and other mid-level positions. Provide regular feedback and opportunities for growth. A diverse mid-level staff increases the probability of diverse top staff in the future.

- **Consult with colleagues who have diverse staffs and with staff associations of color** for ideas on recruitment and retention. Many congressional staff associations of color already have informal partnerships with offices and hiring managers in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate. Formalize these relationships and create an integrated database of candidates for staff positions.
- **Obtain unconscious bias training** for the Member, the chief of staff, and all managerial staff involved in recruitment, hiring, evaluation, and retention.

## About the Authors

**Karra W. McCray** is a recent Master's graduate of Howard University. She earned a Political Science degree with concentrations in Black Politics and American Government. Her research interests include the study of the use of crime as an electoral weapon among candidates and the study of voter disenfranchisement among Black voters. Karra has also worked as a Legislative Aide for the South Carolina House of Representatives. She received her undergraduate degree in Political Science and English from the University of South Carolina.

**Don Bell** is the Director of the Black Talent Initiative at the Joint Center. Prior to this position, Don worked as a legal fellow to Senator Chris Murphy, judiciary staffer to Senator Richard Blumenthal, and associate counsel and then counsel to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Don also served as President of the Senate Black Legislative Staff Caucus (SBLSC). During his term, he conducted a groundbreaking census of Black Senate staffers that inspired a movement toward greater diversity and inclusion in policy making on Capitol Hill. Don received his B.A. and law degree from the University of Connecticut.

**Spencer Overton** is the President of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Spencer is also a tenured Professor of Law at George Washington University, and he has written a book and several other publications on race and equity. Spencer led several projects on the 2008 Obama presidential campaign and transition team, and during the Administration he served as Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General of Legal Policy at the Department of Justice. He clerked for U.S. Court of Appeals Judge Damon J. Keith of the Sixth Court, and graduated with honors from both Hampton University and Harvard Law School. Spencer's maternal grandfather was a native of Chattanooga, and many of his family members currently live in Tennessee.

# Acknowledgments

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We thank Dr. Elsie Scott, who led our efforts in publishing the September 2018 report *Diversity Among Top U.S. House Staff*. Special thanks go to Attia Little, Harin Contractor, Victoria Johnson, Fane Wolfer, and P.J. Stinson, who worked tremendously hard to ensure we created a strong product.

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<sup>1</sup> Page, Scott E. 2008. *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Levine, Sheen S., Evan P. Apfelbaum, Mark Bernard, Valerie L. Bartelt, Edward J. Zajac, and David Stark. 2014. "Ethnic Diversity Deflates Price Bubbles." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. 111(52):18524-29.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. n.d. "ACS 2012-2016 Five Year Estimates" [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_16\\_5YR\\_DP05&src=pt](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_5YR_DP05&src=pt)

<sup>3</sup> Scott, Elsie L., Karra W. McCray, Donald Bell, and Spencer Overton. 2018. *Diversity Among Top U.S. House Staff*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (see methodology on pages 7-10). The Tennessee U.S. House top staff data in this report come from the Joint Center's *Diversity Among Top U.S. House Staff* report, and the Joint Center subsequently researched the Tennessee U.S. Senate top and mid-level staff using a similar methodology tailored to the unique characteristics of the U.S. Senate.

<sup>4</sup> Scott, Elsie L., Karra W. McCray, Donald Bell, and Spencer Overton. 2018. *Diversity Among Top U.S. House Staff*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies; Jones, James R. 2015. *Diversity Among Top Senate Staff*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

<sup>5</sup> Percentage of party turnout data in Tennessee congressional Districts 5 and 9 in 2016 was provided by [BlueLabs](#), an analytics and technology company.

<sup>6</sup> Scott, Elsie L., Karra W. McCray, Donald Bell, and Spencer Overton. 2018. *Diversity Among Top U.S. House Staff*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies; Jones, James R. 2015. *Diversity Among Top Senate Staff*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey Estimates for 115<sup>th</sup> Congress. <https://www.census.gov/mycd/>

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "EEO Reports / Surveys." <http://www.eeoc.gov/employers/reporting.cfm>

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