



November 30, 2018

The Honorable Marsha Blackburn  
Senator-Elect  
B40B Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator-Elect Blackburn:

Congratulations on your election to the United States Senate. As you transition to the 116th Congress and start to fill positions in your U.S. Senate office, we wanted to bring your attention to startling numbers regarding diversity and inclusion in top-level Senate staff.

As you may know, the Joint Center recently [released a report](#) examining top staffers among U.S. Senate and House Members in Tennessee. We found that:

- People of color account for **25.3 percent** of Tennessee's population, but they account for none of the top staffers who work for the U.S. House and U.S. Senate Members who represent Tennessee.
- African Americans make up over **16 percent** of Tennessee's population but account for none of the top staffers who work for the Tennessee congressional delegation.
- In the U.S. Senate offices that represent Tennessee, only 2 mid-level staffers are people of color. Mid-level staff positions are important "feeder" positions for top staff positions.

As you expand your office in the Senate and hire additional top and key mid-level staff, we believe you have an opportunity to start to change these statistics.

In addition to hiring diverse top and mid-level staffers, we urge you to take the following steps immediately in preparation for the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress:

1. **Set Clear Goals:** Promptly develop hiring goals to ensure racial diversity among those hired in new top and key mid-level staff position openings in your office.
2. **Adopt a Diversity Plan:** Develop a written office diversity and inclusion plan that includes recruitment and hiring goals, retention and development strategies for staff, data collection and analysis procedures, a clear allocation of responsibility among staff and performance evaluation for implementation of the plan, and unconscious bias training for all managerial staff involved in recruitment, hiring, evaluation, and retention.

3. ***Rooney Rule:*** Implement the Rooney Rule, which the Senate Democratic Caucus adopted in 2017, in a bipartisan way. This rule requires your office to interview at least one person of color for every top staff position. One of the chief factors in perpetuating the lack of diversity among senior levels has been the lack of recruitment of qualified people of color for senior positions. We believe that the Rooney Rule should be applied to key mid-level staff position openings as well, as a diverse mid-level staffers are important in ensuring a pool of candidates for top positions in the future. Data should be kept to measure compliance with the rule and the effectiveness of the rule.
4. ***Support Chamber-Wide or Conference-Wide Efforts to Improve Staff Diversity,*** such as the creation of an independent and bipartisan Diversity Office.

While we realize there will be some carrying over from your previous congressional office, you can significantly expand your staff and fulfill a promise to your constituents to be an effective representative of all Tennesseans. You have an opportunity to show your constituents that the experiences and skills of all Americans are vital to your work. Ensuring racial diversity among your staff would enhance the deliberation, innovation, legitimacy, and outcomes of your office and of the chamber as a whole.

We look forward to working with you.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Spencer A. Overton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S' and 'O'.

Spencer Overton  
President  
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies