

February 15, 2018

The Honorable Robert Menendez
Ranking Member
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
528 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Menendez:

Congratulations on your recent reappointment to the Ranking Member position on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. As you make staffing decisions moving forward, we ask that you commit to diversity in recruiting, interviewing, and hiring candidates of color for senior positions should there be changes in senior staff. Although some progress has been made with regard to Senate staff diversity, there remains a profound lack of racial diversity among committee staff in the U.S. Senate. We urge you to continue making diversity a priority by doing the following:

1. Apply the Rooney Rule and interview at least one person of color for your staff director and general counsel roles;
2. Commit to hiring diverse candidates throughout your office to ensure that the demographics of your office reflect the demographics of your constituents;
3. Commit to hiring at least one person of color for the staff director or general counsel position.

Members of Congress cannot fully represent all the communities they were elected to serve without advisors that reflect the whole of America.

Committee staffers are essential in the operation and oversight of our federal government. Committee staffers provide political and policy expertise, develop legislation, and act as representatives for Members with constituents and advocacy organizations. These staffers are also vital in conducting agency oversight and vetting nominees for key executive branch positions. **Currently, there are no African American or Latino staff directors in the U.S. Senate.**

In December 2015, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies conducted a study on [*Racial Diversity Among Top Senate Staff*](#). In a nation that was 36% people of color, just 7.1% of senior Senate staffers, defined as chief of staff, legislative director, communications director, and committee staff director, were people of color.

The problem affects both Democrats and Republicans. For example, although African Americans account for 23% of Democratic votes nationwide, African Americans currently account for only 1.8% of Democratic senior staff. Latino Americans currently account for only 3.6% of Democratic senior staff.

In 2016, a movement began to remove the barriers that have closed the door of opportunity to qualified people of color seeking to serve the American people on Capitol Hill. The movement has been clear: the status quo is no longer acceptable. Diversity must be a priority.

Together, we can continue the progress in ensuring that our most democratic branch of government is truly representative of our nation. We look forward to working with you.

Thank you,

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO

Diversity Matters

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Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

National Coalition on Black Civic Participation and Black Women's Roundtable

National Organization of Black County Officials

National Urban League