

Testimony Concerning the Creation of a Senate Office of Human Capital, 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 2024

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 Human Capital. We are a cross-partisan coalition of organizations concerned about strengthening the congressional workforce that supports the United States Senate.

When the 118th Congress was sworn in, it made history as the congressional class with the largest number of individuals from a range of different backgrounds 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 underrepresented racial and ethnic population 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 congressional representatives from a broad range of backgrounds. In addition, research has found that inclusive staffing is associated with many positive benefits, including creativity, innovation, objectivity, productivity and positive working environments.²

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

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 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 for the Executive branch and private sector, which have significantly higher average salaries. These two factors, working in tandem, have a detrimental impact on the congressional workforce and the health of the institution.

Recommendation:

We strongly urge for the establishment of a Senate Office of Human Capital—which could be housed within the Senate Sergeant at Arms' Employment Office—to help strengthen the Senate workforce. This office could gather and publish demographic data and information about congressional staff in personal, committee, and leadership offices, helping to foster a stronger, more equitable and accountable chamber. This office could also provide best practices for congressional employee intake and assessment for offices of the Senate, helping to save time and resources for personal, committee, and leadership office managers. We urge the Senate to build upon the foundation laid by the proposed bipartisan Senate Task Force in the draft Senate Fiscal Year 2023 Legislative Branch Appropriations bill and establish a Senate Office of Human Capital.

Accordingly, the following language could be included in the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch report:

The Senate Office of Human Capital of the Senate shall be established within 90 days of enactment of this legislation. The Majority Leader, in consultation with the Minority Leader, shall appoint a Director of the Office from recommendations provided by the chair of the Committee on Rules and Administration in consultation with the ranking minority member of such committee.

Not later than 60 days after the appointment of the Director of the Office, the Office shall submit to the Committee on Rules and Administration an operational plan for the Office that shall include, consistent with applicable Senate rules, regulations, and law, a plan for appointing and establishing duties for staff of the Office which shall set forth a proposed maximum number of staff.

Not later than 90 days after submitting the operational plan, the Office shall submit a plan to the Committee on Rules and Administration for the committee's review

and approval, and shall include in the plan the following: (A) Policies to direct and guide Senate employing offices to recruit, hire, train, develop, advance, promote, and retain an empowered workforce, consistent with applicable Senate rules, regulations, and law. (B) The development of a survey, in consultation with the Committee on Rules and Administration, to evaluate demographic data in Senate employing offices. (C) A framework for the Senate demographic report. (D) A proposal for the composition of an Advisory Council that shall, as necessary, inform the work of the Office. (E) Any additional components as determined by the Committee on Rules and Administration. At the end of each session of Congress, the Office shall submit a Senate Human Capital report to the Majority Leader, the Majority Leader and Minority Leader, the chair and ranking minority member of the Committee on Rules and Administration, and the chair and ranking minority member of the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch of the Committee on Appropriations.

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