

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

January 08, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Biden-Harris Transition Office  
1401 Constitution Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Mr. Blinken:

Congratulations on your nomination to serve as Secretary of State in the Biden-Harris Administration. We thank you for your history of public service and look forward to joining you in the significant work of reestablishing America's principled leadership and engagement around the globe. Our elections showed that America is eager for a new beginning and we are encouraged by the Biden-Harris administration's agenda of responsible international re-engagement and selection of a cabinet that is reflective of our nation's diversity.

We also believe this attitude must be reflected in our internal affairs and ask for your commitment to improving diversity and inclusion at the Department of State. From human rights abuses to infectious diseases and environmental injustices, women and communities of color continue to be on the frontlines, disproportionately shouldering global suffering. As we seek to address these inequalities, I/we hope you will share in my/our conviction that our nation needs the insight and meaningful participation of these communities to achieve lasting change.

In conducting oversight, the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress identified concerning deficiencies in State Department diversity. These included the persistence of grave disparities in racial and ethnic minority representation in the Foreign Service, as well as declining representation of women and minorities in the Civil Service and lower rates of advancement by women and minority civil servants. The most senior leadership roles in the Department further reflect these challenges with dismal rates of minority representation relative to lower employment tiers and to the U.S. population. We strongly support the solutions proposed in Rep. Castro's *Diversity and Inclusion at the Department of State Act* to aid in addressing these challenges and would be glad to discuss this further at your convenience.

We also examined individual cases such as that of retired diplomat Tianna Spears, which revealed problematic lapses in State Department support when minority personnel faced discrimination, including at the hands of U.S. government officials. Ms. Spears' experiences, culminating in her departure from service, provide yet another reminder of how we must do better and the cost of failing to do so.

The Department's commitment to diversity must begin with making diversity in hiring one of its highest priorities, setting policies that promote deeper engagement with underrepresented communities, and fostering meaningful inclusion and professional advancement for all who answer the call to service. It is not enough to meet staffing quotas. These efforts should also extend to providing support when challenges arise for employees during their service, particularly for junior employees and those from underrepresented groups who may have fewer direct connections to mentorship and leadership.

As the United States rightly rebalances its investments in diplomacy and human rights, we will be most effective only when our most diverse, capable team is empowered to lead. Research has long demonstrated that the absence of diversity makes organizations prone to blind spots, hidden bias, and dampened creativity, while teams that can leverage a diversity of experiences and outlooks achieve richer brainstorming, produce novel solutions, and regularly outperform their peers.

The work ahead of us is great, and the stakes have scarcely been higher. As we continue to combat a global pandemic, a warming climate, and wavering global trust in the promise of democracy, we cannot afford to do anything other than engage the full breadth of American ingenuity and intellect.

We look forward to working closely with you during your tenure to achieve meaningful improvement to diversity and inclusion at the State Department.

Sincerely,



Veronica Escobar  
Member of Congress



Joaquin Castro  
Member of Congress