

April 15, 2021

Congresswoman Grace Meng (NY-6)
Testimony to the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress
Member Day Hearing

Chair Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and Members of this Committee, thank you for this opportunity to come before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, and share a few of my priorities to strengthen and make more inclusive this esteemed institution.

Whether we are here in the People's House or back home in our districts, each of us carry deep pride and appreciation in having the honor to serve our constituents. Every day, I strive to best represent my constituents of New York's Sixth Congressional district, while trying to make Congress more accessible for everyone back home.

First, in this spirit, I propose that we look to find new and creative ways to track a member's impact on a given piece of legislation. Currently, a third party might measure a member's effectiveness by the number of bills she or he got passed and enacted into law. I believe this type of measurement neither captures the incredible workings of our democracy nor the full picture of the legislative process. I would be remiss if I also didn't point out that such metrics disproportionately favors committee chairs. It also makes invisible the hard work of so many of our other members who are not committee chairs. Another issue is that one mechanism of the legislative process is the practice of advancing large package of bills, which again, only notes the lead sponsoring member. Noting only the singular member as the lead sponsor, disregards the hard negotiations that comprise the larger legislative package and process.

That is why I propose creating different methods and metrics that reveal the nuances of the legislative process. For instance, a large package that is comprised of different provisions pulled from other bills should attribute these provisions with their respective sponsors of said bills. Additionally, bills that are co-led by a lead minority sponsor should also be listed. Attributing the minority party's role in the bill's successes would also incentivize greater bipartisanship – something we need more of in Congress.

As members of Congress, we know the legislative process is neither one-dimensional nor a straight line. Instead, it is an incredible complex web – a puzzle – that is pieced together from start to finish. I hope that in setting new metrics to reveal the complexity and nuances of Congress, we can more effectively relay the significant impact our constituents make in the formulation and advancement of our legislative work.

Second, I urge continued diversity initiatives in Congress. We have already made great strides in bolstering staff diversity, and such efforts must continue. In fact, as the Chair of the Committee on Caucus Procedures, I was proud to help implement a Diversity Rule into the Caucus Rules during the 116th Congress. With greater diversity, however, we must also ensure the climate and culture of Congress support the increasing diversity of our staff and colleagues.

That is why I support requiring mandatory implicit bias training for all members and staff. The vitriol and misinformation in Congress impedes this body to work successfully. We must ensure greater decorum on how Members address one another, and we need a Hill culture that treats one another with respect.

In fact, in the immediate aftermath of the horrific mass shooting in the Atlanta-area that killed eight women – six of whom were Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women – I heard from many staff who were struggling to process this terror. Some of this staff were the only staffer of color on their team, and they had difficulty opening up to their colleagues about this tragedy. While we promote greater

diversity in Congress, we must ensure that we have systems in place to further cultivate this increasing diverse workforce.

Third, I urge that any Congressionally-funded reports include data disaggregation with regards to the AAPI community. Specifically, when these reports analyze policy impacts on communities of color, AAPIs should not be classified as “other,” and instead, this data should capture the diversity within the AAPI community. The AAPI community is neither a monolith nor a “model minority;” our community is made up of nearly 50 different ethnic groups, and hundreds of different languages. AAPIs have some of the highest gaps in educational attainment, and highest rates in poverty – including child and senior poverty rates, uninsured, long-term unemployment, and racial and gender pay disparity. There are 23 million AAPIs in the U.S. – making up six percent of the population – but we are the fastest growing racial or ethnic group. We cannot overlook the Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

Thank you again to this Select Committee for allowing me to testify. I ardently hope that we can work together on the priorities I have set forth today.