

**Congressman Pete Aguilar (CA-31)**  
**Written Testimony**  
**House Select Committee on Modernization of Congress**  
**Thursday, April 15, 2021**

I want to thank the Chair and Vice Chair for their commitment to advancing and strengthening the House of Representatives, and allowing me the opportunity to share my thoughts about additional areas the Committee should focus on in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress.

In its first two years, this Committee has helped shine the line on the importance of congressional staff diversity and supporting the communities that we were elected to represent in Washington, D.C.

**Diversity of Congressional Staff**

I'm grateful to the Committee for the work it's done to ensure that our congressional workforce is representative of the communities and country that we represent. One way the Committee has helped us move closer to this goal is by recommending the permanence of the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion and by acknowledging the importance of studies on staff pay. These recommendations will help Congress not only hire diverse staffers, but retain their talents and ensure they have an equal opportunity to advance their careers on Capitol Hill.

However, there are still talented Americans excluded from serving their country by working in Congress, including Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) recipients with valid work authorization. An obscure provision in the Legislative Branch appropriations bill bars DACA recipients from working in federal agencies and Congress. These are professionals who want to dedicate their careers to public service and are unable to do so. It's a blatant contradiction for Congress to want to diversify our staff but also have provisions in place that bar talented, diverse staff from joining in the first place. I have worked with my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee over the last two fiscal years to remove this language, and I am thankful to my Appropriations colleague, Representative Ann Kirkpatrick, for her bill to remove this provision. I ask your committee to consider this issue as a top priority as we discuss the modernization of Congress and those who work here.

**Community Project Funding**

This Committee also created a pathway to allow the House to harness the power of the purse by directing certain spending for our districts, now known as Community Project Funding, in the Appropriations Committee. The Committee helped bring about this change by hosting an initial hearing on how to bring transparency and accountability back into the appropriations process. Its final recommendation emphasized that any return to directed spending emphasize meaningful investments in our communities. I encourage the Committee to continue to study and issue recommendations about how the Appropriations Committee and Members can make this new process transparent and be good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

I want to close by once again thanking the Members of this Committee for their tireless efforts to improve this institution in a strong bipartisan fashion. Your timely recommendations have improved the overall function of the House of Representatives, including by supporting technical and organizational changes that make it easier for Members of Congress and our staffs to operate efficiently and effectively to serve the American people. I look forward to continuing my work with each of you.