

# CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE (TX-18)

## STATEMENT BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, JUSTICE, AND SCIENCE

### MEMBER DAY HEARING ON COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT FOR FY2021 WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2020 1:45 P.M. H-309, CAPITOL

*Chairman Serrano, Ranking Member Aderholt and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:*

- As a senior member of the Committees on the Judiciary and on Homeland Security, let me offer my appreciation and thanks to Chairman Serrano and Ranking Member Aderholt for the difficult work and choices that must be made to produce a truly bipartisan CJS spending bill, and for their commitment to the advancement of science and commerce, to the fair administration of justice, and to developing sensible reforms to make our criminal justice system better.
- Mr. Chairman, I understand that my entire statement will be made part of the record so I will keep my remarks brief. In the few minutes allotted I wish to highlight three areas which warrant the Committee's continuing attention and support: (1) criminal justice reform; (2) advancement of scientific knowledge and space exploration; and (3) expanding economic opportunity to women and minority business enterprises so they compete for and win procurement contracts and programs grants.
- Chairman Serrano, there is no higher priority than the safety, security, health and wellbeing of the American people.
- Protecting the national security means more than combatting a military attack, it also means combatting national disasters and epidemics.
- All Americans are concerned about the Coronavirus, it is evolving into a global epidemic that is quickly spreading.
- We are basically nickeling-and-diming the response when we know that there are urgent needs that are not getting met.

- Since its founding, the United States of America has risen to past challenges and relied on innovative technology, research, and science to change the world for the better.
- The United States' approach to the Coronavirus should be no different.
- This subcommittee has a vital role when it comes to equipping the American scientific community with the resources it needs to not only research, understand, and solve the challenges of the Coronavirus but also protect the American people from other diseases that may arise in the future.
- It is imperative that our allies and partners around the world obtain the diagnostic equipment, medical supplies, doctors, workers, hospitals and any additional resources essential to stopping the spread of this virus.
- And so, I urge this committee to provide robust funding to our agencies so we can conduct the research necessary to create a vaccine that will protect the lives of millions.
- The motto of this country, "E Pluribus Unum" means out of many, one.
- By taking collective action to combat this pandemic, we can impede the Coronavirus abroad, protect the health and wellbeing of the people and ensure the safety of our nation.
- Time is of the essence and it is the responsibility of all nations and people to come together in combatting this virus.

## **I. CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM**

### **I support \$330 million for Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) programs**

- Robust funding for the COPS Office and programs is needed to provide resources and technical assistance to state and local law enforcement agencies to keep our communities safe *and in rebuilding the necessary trust and confidence* between law enforcement and the communities they swear an oath to serve and protect.

### **I support \$95 million for the National Instant Background Check Systems (NICS) Improvement Amendments Act of 2007**

- This funding is urgently needed so that states have the resources needed to upgrade criminal and mental health records made under the authority of the NICS Improvement Amendments Act of 2007 (PL 110-108).

**I support \$475 million for the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant program**

- The strength of the Byrne JAG program is in its impact across the criminal justice system, from law enforcement to prosecution and courts, crime prevention and education, corrections and community corrections, drug treatment and enforcement, program planning, evaluation, technology improvement, and crime victim and witness initiatives.

**I support \$270 million for the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program**

- It is important to recognize the vital role that SCAAP funding plays in compensating local law enforcement for fulfilling what is essentially a federal function. Texas is estimated to spend tens of millions to incarcerate undocumented criminal aliens, yet the state is reimbursed under SCAAP for less than 10 percent of these expenses.

**I support \$200 million for the Second Chance Act**

- The Second Chance Act is an important federal investment in strategies to increase public safety and reduce recidivism by authorizing funding for the development and coordination of reentry services, such as employment training, substance abuse treatment, and mentoring. The Second Chance Act provides grants to government agencies, tribes and nonprofit groups and other services that address those at most risk for re-offending.

**I support \$600 million for Violence Against Women Act programs.**

- VAWA programs, including grants to encourage arrest and to provide transitional housing for victims, work together to ensure that the systemic responses to domestic violence and sexual assault are improved and that all victims, whether they live in urban centers or isolated rural areas, can receive lifesaving services and legal assistance.

**I support \$50 million to Prevent the Trafficking of Girls**

This funding will support the DOJ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in establishing a grant for nonprofits and other nongovernmental entities with a proven track record of administering successful prevention and early intervention programs for girls vulnerable to trafficking, displaying the relevant risk factors, at a local or state-level, to scale up and replicate these such programs at a national level.

**I support \$320 million for Juvenile Justice Program Grants**

- Federal funding of these important programs is a proven and cost-effective way to prevent crime in local communities, reduce youth incarceration, and foster better outcomes for youth. Additionally, federal investment in juvenile justice is fiscally responsible because prevention and intervention programs keep at-risk youth out of the criminal justice system and saves taxpayer dollars by reducing incarceration rates.

**I support \$150 million for the Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Grant Program**

- This critical funding will provide federal grants to state and local governments to help eliminate the current backlog of unprocessed DNA samples at crime labs. Congress demonstrated its continued bipartisan support for the Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Grant Program when it extended the program through FY2019 in the Debbie Smith Reauthorization Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-182).

**I support \$550 million for the Legal Services Corporation (LSC)**

- Congress established LSC to operate as a private, nonprofit corporation to promote equal access to justice and to provide grants for high-quality civil legal assistance to low-income persons and families. LSC distributes more than 90% of its total funding

to 134 independent nonprofit legal aid programs that provide legal assistance to low-income individuals and families in every congressional district.

- Programs that receive LSC grants help the most vulnerable, such as military veterans seeking disability benefits, families facing unlawful evictions or foreclosures, and women seeking protection from abuse.

## **II. SCIENCE AND SPACE EXPLORATION**

### **I support \$1.35 billion for NASA's Commercial Crew Program (CCP)**

- Since the retirement of the Space Shuttle fleet, we have been reliant upon the Russians to launch American astronauts to the International Space Station, and return them safely to Earth. I think it fair to say that there is a bipartisan consensus in the Congress that the interests of the United States should not be dependent upon the goodwill or good graces of Russia, and especially not in the area of space which is critical to America's national security.

### **I support \$45 million for the National Space Grant College and Fellowship Program**

- Space Grant is a competitive, national program that is responsive to regional and national needs and that is administered through state-based consortia in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.
- The Space Grant program has proven to be very effective at fulfilling national STEM goals—91% of students who were significantly supported by Space Grant consortia and graduated in 2010 are now active in STEM jobs with NASA, industry and academia, or are pursuing advanced STEM degrees.

### **I support \$40 million for the Hispanic-Serving Institutions Undergraduate Program at the National Science Foundation**

- The America COMPETES Act, created a Hispanic-Serving Institutions program at the National Science Foundation (NSF). The HSI Program is designed to increase the recruitment, retention and graduation rates of Hispanic students pursuing

degrees in science, mathematics, engineering or technology and to increase the quality of STEM education.

### **III. COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

#### **I support \$40 million for the Minority Business Development Agency**

- The mission of MBDA is to foster the growth and competitiveness of U.S. businesses that are minority-owned. Minority firms currently provide nearly 5.8 million people with steady jobs, but have the potential to create 17.5 million jobs, leading to stronger communities and bolstering America's economy. MBDA's investment in minority-owned firms contributes to our long-term economic progress and stability.

#### **I support \$280 million for the Economic Development Administration**

- The Economic Development Administration partners with communities in every state to strengthen local economies and create jobs. EDA programs provide rural and urban communities with critical economic development tools designed to spur business creation and economic growth.

### **CONCLUSION**

- Mr. Chairman, I thank you and the Ranking Member for your leadership and for extending me this opportunity to share some of my priorities with you.