

To: Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee

Date: Wednesday, April 16, 2024

From: The Honorable Sylvia R. Garcia (D-TX-29)

Re: Member Testimony for Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee Member Day on Wednesday, April 17, 2024

Thank you, Mr. Chair, Ranking Member, and Committee Members for the opportunity to provide written testimony to the Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee as part of today's Member Day.

This is an important opportunity for Members of the House of Representatives to advocate for their constituents, share their priorities, and help shape the appropriations process for Fiscal Year 2025.

Over the last several years, Congress has taken decisive action to ensure that Congress and all levels of government better reflect our nation's diversity – building pathways of opportunity for America's next generation of leaders.

The Subcommittee should build on this critical work by ensuring that the Legislative Branch appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2025 expands federal employment requirements to include recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

As you know, the DACA program was established in 2012 to protect eligible immigrants, who came to the United States when they were children, from deportation. The program also provides recipients with work authorizations, allowing them to be legally employed in the U.S.

DACA recipients make immeasurable contributions to our communities – paying billions in federal and state taxes each year.

DACA recipients are American in every way and influence all sectors of our society. These young men and women serve in uniform, teach our children, start businesses on Main Streets across the country, and contribute to the fabric of our communities in every conceivable way.

DACA recipients occupy roles and are pursuing degrees in critical industries that influence government policy and operations, including tech, finance, health care, education, environment, and law.

Dreamers support America and now America needs to support Dreamers.

Just as DACA recipients are already making a positive difference across the country, they are positioned to make significant contributions to the federal workforce. Yet, despite having work authorizations, they are inexplicably and unfairly barred from serving in the federal workforce.

DACA recipients have been serving as federal interns and fellows through third party entities, contributing diverse experience and expertise to the work of the federal government, but have no avenue for permanent federal employment.

Historically, appropriations legislation has routinely prohibited the federal government from hiring non-citizens.

It is time that Congress finally eliminated this unnecessary and unfair barrier that keeps DACA recipients from seeking federal employment. This would give thousands of DACA recipients across the nation, including more than 95,000 in my home state of Texas, the opportunity to continue contributing to the United States, the only country they call home. Congress, and the federal government more broadly, would benefit greatly from the contributions of DACA recipients.

In addition to this critical priority, the Subcommittee should provide adequate funding to support diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in Congress.

Until recently, the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), a non-partisan and non-legislative support office, was responsible for addressing the state of underrepresentation in the Congressional workforce.

Since its inception in the 116th Congress, the ODI assisted approximately 2,678 jobseekers and conducted over 1,526 consultations with employing offices. The office referred over 6,441 resumes to hiring managers and helped approximately 730 jobseekers land congressional careers.

Further, ODI's research initiatives and surveys shed critical light on the state of workforce representation, compensation, benefits, and demographic makeup of the U.S. House of Representatives workforce, which guided actions taken by Congress to make it a more representative, fair, and equitable place to work.

Despite ODI's strong record of service to members regardless of political affiliation, some Republicans eager to score cheap political points in their crusade against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives worked to eliminate ODI in its entirety as part of the Fiscal Year 2024 Legislative Branch appropriations bill.

While non-partisan staff and critical functions of ODI were ultimately protected and moved to be housed under the Chief Administrative Officer, it is clear that the ODI operated at its best when it was fully dedicated to advancing equity for our Asian American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, and LGBTQ+ communities, along with other underserved communities, including women, veterans, and individuals with disabilities.

I therefore request that the Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee work on a bipartisan basis to restore the existence and robust funding of the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion in the 119th Congress and beyond. We must ensure that Congress better reflects the diversity and lived experiences of our constituents.

I am grateful for the opportunity to share these priorities for your consideration, and I encourage all members of the subcommittee committee to work with me to get this done.

Thank you.