

Written Testimony
“Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Department of State”
U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability
Washington, D.C.
Tuesday, June 13, 2023

Chairman Mast, Ranking Member Crow, and esteemed members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the work of my office and the Department of State’s proposed FY 2024 budget for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, or DEIA.

As the Department of State’s first Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, I believe our nation’s diversity and values of inclusion and equity are one of our greatest national strengths and a comparative advantage for our engagement and leadership in the world.

I note the work of supporting DEIA began in prior Administrations, including important work done by the last Administration. I am proud of what my team and I have been able to accomplish in the last two years. As I prepare to transition out of my position, I am optimistic about the future, and I anticipate my successor, who has yet to be named, will build on our achievements.

As you know, Secretary Blinken has an agenda to modernize the State Department to address our national security challenges with maximum effectiveness. These modernization efforts include: building capacity and expertise in critical mission areas; encouraging innovation; modernizing technology and data usage; reinvigorating our relationship with risk; and recruiting, retaining, and empowering a diverse workforce. This makes getting DEIA right a national security priority.

DEIA is an integral part of the Secretary’s modernization agenda, and the Biden-Harris Administration believes diversity of thought, background, perspective, and lived experience must be at the policy-making table. The Department needs an inclusive workforce with equitable opportunities to ensure our foreign policy is as strong, smart, and creative as it can be.

As we work towards achieving our modernization goals, I focused on three primary lines of effort: transparency, inclusion, and accountability.

Let me first outline what I mean by transparency. We cannot achieve merit-based advancement without data. I have worked to create a quantitative and qualitative baseline for the Department against which to measure future progress. We must make evidence-informed decisions about what policies, practices, and procedures the Department might need to change to ensure equal opportunity for all employees.

My office has now published a demographic baseline report that provides an unprecedented look at our bureaus, broken down by race, ethnicity, gender, status of disability, grade, rank, and job series skill codes. We plan to release an updated report annually to begin to show trend lines. Now that we have a better sense of who we are, we can better ensure we tap the best and brightest among all Americans to represent this great nation.

We intend to attract, hire, promote, and retain talent, and remove barriers that might keep some from rising as far as their talents can take them. This goal is widely shared by our workforce and Congress. I thank you for your leadership and support for improving DEIA and note our goal is to fully implement Congressional intent.

My office sponsored a survey last year in which almost 9,000 employees -- a third of our direct hires -- participated. Their top recommendation was to focus on removing barriers to merit-based advancement. We are now conducting three barrier analyses to inform possible procedural changes. One looks at progression to the Senior Executive Service for Civil Service employees; another examines bidding for assignments in the Foreign Service; and the third looks at Civil Service applicant flow data and compares those who were deemed eligible to be hired against those who were hired. We expect to release the results this summer.

Second, let me address inclusion. In an effort to create a more inclusive work environment, our Civil and Foreign Service personnel are now annually evaluated in part on how their work helps advance some aspect of transparency, inclusion, or accountability. It's no longer just my job.

We also developed a policy to counter discriminatory treatment of our U.S. employees abroad. For example, employees abroad often experience discrimination by foreign customs and immigrations officials. Our Missions must now report such treatment to the Department and protest it to the host nation government. We have secured in some cases official apologies and commitments to new training procedures.

Thanks to the work of this Committee, we have also successfully converted select internship programs to paid internships. This is another big win for inclusion. Paid internships open career opportunities for young Americans across the country who otherwise could not afford to offer free labor to the Department. We secured permission for nursing mothers to use lactation devices in classified working spaces, and we changed the preferred typeface used by the Department to one that is more accessible to those who are sight-impaired.

Third, I will explain what I mean by accountability. In the survey I referenced, a concerning percentage of our employees reported experiences of discrimination, harassment, or bullying. Few expressed confidence that the Department was committed to addressing the issues.

We are developing mechanisms to track whether effective action was taken by relevant management when harassment has been substantiated. The Department is developing plans to take on toxic conduct, not covered by the legal definition of harassment, to include bullying. And we have eliminated confidentiality clauses in settlement cases which many employees felt was akin to a “gag” order that served to protect those who they alleged had harassed or discriminated against them.

Finally, let me turn to the budget that support our efforts. Until recently, the Department did not track DEIA spending. We established a “budget code” for DEIA only in FY 2023. The Department has a comprehensive DEIA budget request for FY 2024 of just over \$76 million. A little under ten percent of that funding would go to my office. The remaining 90 percent of the request is spread across other bureaus. My office coordinates closely with these bureaus and the rest of the Department to successfully implement DEIA initiatives and to ensure there is no duplication of resources.

The FY 2024 budget request for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion is just over \$7 million. With that budget, we fund our barrier analyses, demographic baseline reports, special reports on thematic issues, and travel to our Missions to engage with our workforce. It also includes our small project initiatives which provide funds for projects that advance DEIA domestically or abroad. The budget request would allow me to increase my staff from 12 to 14 positions.

I want to close by expressing my thanks in advance for your broad support for the Department's workforce and mission as well as my work to advance transparency, inclusion, and accountability. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and respond to questions you may have.