

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 20, 2020

The Honorable Robert A. DeLeo
Speaker of the House
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Office of the Speaker
Boston, MA 02113

The Honorable Karen E. Spilka
Senate President
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Office of the Senate
Boston, MA 02113

The Honorable William F. Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
24 Beacon Street
Office of the Speaker
Boston, MA 02113

Dear President Spilka, Speaker DeLeo, and Secretary Galvin,

We are writing in support of the Black State House staffers and Beacon BLOC regarding their July 19 letter calling for establishing policies that will foster safe and inclusive work environments within the Massachusetts Legislature. As members of the Massachusetts Congressional delegation, we stand in solidarity with these staffers and affirm Beacon BLOC's demands for greater inclusion and equity in the workplace. We ask you to join us in this critical work.

Our nation is in the midst of a landmark moment of reckoning. Communities across the Commonwealth and the nation are calling for the dismantling of racist policies and systems that have perpetuated and exacerbated the deeply entrenched inequities and disparities in our nation. It is critical that in this moment, every institution, particularly institutions of power charged with crafting the very laws and policies that govern our Commonwealth and our country, look inward and examine their own contributions to the persistent inequities plaguing our communities.

Much of this starts by examining who is represented at our policymaking tables. Currently, the Massachusetts Legislature only has 20 members of color, with Black and Latinx legislators making up less than 7 percent of the 200 seats in the House and Senate. The lack of diversity at the staff level is felt daily by current and former staff of color. Their experiences are dismissed and incidents of harassment not necessarily handled appropriately as the State House lacks the adequate infrastructure to measure issues related to diversity and retention. The lack of

proactive support and data-driven focus on inclusion is central to the actions Beacon BLOC has outlined.

This is an all too familiar phenomenon in our nation's institutions of power. Since 1870, only 162 Black Americans have served in Congress, a figure that denotes the resilience of Black Americans' continued fight for representation, equity, and dignity within the nation they in large part built.¹ While the first Black U.S. Senator was elected in 1870, only 10 in the history of our country have served. Amongst Congressional staff in the United States House of Representatives, in September 2018, despite making up 38 percent of the United States population, less than 14 percent of staffers identify as people of color.² Similarly, today in the Senate, only 11 percent of top staffers are people of color.³ If precise, intentional action isn't taken to address the structural barriers presently at work within our institutions, including the United States Congress and the Massachusetts Legislature, our policy decisions will lack the critically needed perspective and input of Black and brown residents and their communities, and will not address the root causes of the longstanding inequities in our country.

We also wish to express our concerns about retaliatory consequences that threaten additional staff of color from being vocal about their concerns and experiences within the Massachusetts Legislature. No employee should be threatened with retaliation or termination for airing grievances with their employers, especially when speaking out against social and economic injustices. Actions that promote opportunities for staff to speak out about their experiences such as the Massachusetts House of Representatives' working group on employee diversity and inclusion are positive steps to this end.

Therefore, we offer our support for the reforms proposed by Beacon BLOC, which include the creation of a centralized office on diversity, equity, and inclusion, the establishment of new tools to report harassment and discrimination in the workplace, and the development of improved hiring practices to diversify legislative staff and ensure that communities of color and other historically marginalized communities are represented in the operations of the Massachusetts legislature. The U.S. House and Senate Democrats have pursued diversity initiatives for several years. This Congress, the U.S. House formally created the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to address the lack of diversity among House staff, and we encourage the Massachusetts Legislature to consider doing the same.

We support the commitment among legislators, staff, and allies on Beacon Hill to work towards the bicameral institutional changes necessary to promote the culture of anti-racism, inclusivity, and equity that our communities rightfully deserve and that this moment in time requires. Beacon BLOC has created a framework to do just that and we urge you to heed their

¹ John W. Schoen and Yelena Dzhanova, These Two Charts Show the Lack of Diversity in the House and Senate, CNBC, (Jun. 2, 2020), <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/02/these-two-graphics-show-the-lack-of-diversity-in-the-house-and-senate.html>

² The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Racial Diversity Among Top U.S. House Staff, (Sept. 11, 2018), <https://jointcenter.org/joint-center-releases-report-on-racial-diversity-among-top-house-staff/>

³ The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Racial Diversity Among Top Staff in Senate Personal Offices, (Aug. 21, 2020), <https://jointcenter.org/racial-diversity-among-top-staff-in-senate-personal-offices/>

calls. We look forward to our continued work together to serve the people of the Commonwealth.

We appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Ayanna Pressley
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Joseph P. Kennedy III
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



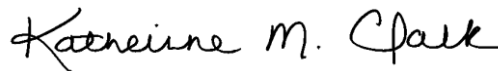
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