

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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October 15, 2021

Ambassador Susan Rice
Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy
White House Domestic Policy Council
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Shalanda Young
Acting Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Ambassador Rice and Acting Director Young:

On his first day in office, President Biden signed a historic executive order establishing a whole-of-government effort to embed equity in all aspects of the federal government and eliminate barriers to equal opportunities for underserved communities.¹ We write to express our strong support for this order, entitled “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government,” and to highlight key steps to implement the order effectively.

President Biden’s executive order directed the White House Domestic Policy Council to lead an interagency process “to remove systemic barriers to and provide equal access to opportunities and benefits, identify communities the Federal Government has underserved, and develop policies designed to advance equity for those communities.”²

The President’s order also directed the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to work with federal agencies to identify barriers to equal opportunity and programmatic benefits for people of color and other underserved groups. As part of this effort, OMB was charged with studying methods for assessing barriers to equity and reporting best practices and recommendations to the President by July 20, 2021. The order also tasked OMB with providing guidance by August 8, 2021, to federal agencies to assess whether people of color and underserved communities face barriers to programmatic benefits.³

We applaud the Biden-Harris Administration’s bold efforts to address longstanding structural inequities rooted in our nation’s historical and ongoing legacy of systemic racism, which have been laid bare by the coronavirus pandemic. Progress toward equity cannot be

¹ Exec. Order No. 13985, 86 Fed. Reg. 7009 (Jan. 20, 2021). This order also revoked President Trump’s Executive Order 13950, which restricted diversity and inclusion training in the federal government, and Executive Order 13958, which established the 1776 Commission.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

sustained without the federal government's commitment to and development of institutional infrastructure to overcome historical injustices at scale.⁴

To ensure the success of the Biden-Harris Administration's agenda, racial equity must be central to decision-making across the federal government. This sweeping objective will require the collection of data that aligns with an up-to-date understanding of people's identities and that reflects how diverse groups are differently situated. Most federal agencies do not yet collect this type of data. According to OMB's July 2021 report on equity assessment best practices, many agencies lack access to data on the "personal characteristics of their program participants needed to understand differences in inclusion, services, and benefits." The report also found that agencies that collect demographic data from program participants often lack the "structures, processes, or mechanisms to deploy that data for purposes of assessing equity."⁵

Without access to crucial demographic data such as race, ethnicity, disability, and income, agencies cannot properly identify barriers to equity or develop meaningful plans to remove these barriers. The establishment of the White House Interagency Working Group on Equitable Data is an important first step toward collecting data that can be used to promote equitable policies and programs across the federal government.⁶

While equitable data practices are necessary to achieve equitable outcomes, such practices alone are not sufficient. As President Biden's executive order recognizes, meaningful progress toward equity requires the use of assessment tools to analyze the impact of agencies' policies and programs on minority and underserved communities.⁷ Equity assessments have been used to understand how barriers to equity drive disparate outcomes in these communities. These tools have also been used to identify programs and policies that have successfully closed equity gaps and addressed remaining obstacles.⁸

Robust stakeholder engagement is also central to achieving racial equity. As a result, the executive order calls for federal agencies to increase coordination and engagement with community-based and civil rights organizations.⁹ The more community members are engaged in the administration of agency programs and policies, the more likely it is that all voices will be heard as part of equitable decision-making across the federal government. As OMB explained in its July 2021 report, "Stakeholder engagement has become a critical resource for defining

⁴ Office of Management and Budget, *Study to Identify Methods to Assess Equity: Report to the President* (July 2021) (online at www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/OMB-Report-on-E013985-Implementation_508-Compliant-Secure-v1.1.pdf).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Exec. Order No. 13985, 86 Fed. Reg. 7009, at § 9 (Jan. 20, 2021).

⁷ *Id.*, at § 1.

⁸ Office of Management and Budget, *Study to Identify Methods to Assess Equity: Report to the President* (July 2021) (online at www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/OMB-Report-on-E013985-Implementation_508-Compliant-Secure-v1.1.pdf).

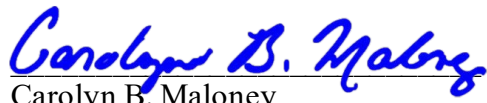
⁹ Exec. Order No. 13985, 86 Fed. Reg. 7009, at § 8 (Jan. 20, 2021).

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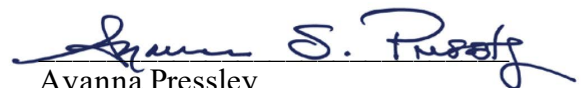
relevant problems and for crowdsourcing innovative solutions from those closest to the problem or opportunity.”¹⁰

Addressing systemic racism across all functions of the federal government must be an urgent priority. To do so effectively, agencies must first collect the required data, conduct in-depth analyses, and engage with stakeholders. We look forward to working with the Biden-Harris Administration to advance racial equity throughout the federal government.

Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Ranking Member

¹⁰ Office of Management and Budget, *Study to Identify Methods to Assess Equity: Report to the President* (July 2021) (online at www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/OMB-Report-on-E013985-Implementation_508-Compliant-Secure-v1.1.pdf).