

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 18, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

President-elect Joseph R. Biden
Biden-Harris Transition
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Vice-President-elect Kamala Harris
Biden-Harris Transition
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear President-elect Biden and Vice President-elect Harris:

As Congressional leaders in disability policy, we commend you on your stated commitment to hiring a diverse workforce that reflects the American people. Our country is currently in the midst of a public health, racial justice, and economic crisis, and it will require all of us working together to recover. As you work to fill key positions in the executive branch, we urge you to hire and appoint people with disabilities throughout all agencies and departments and select appointees who will prioritize the rights of Americans with disabilities from Day 1 of your administration.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 61 million Americans have a disability. Physical, mental, intellectual and developmental disabilities impact people of all ages, races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations and geographic locations, and anyone can become disabled at any time. Major federal laws ensuring the rights of people with disabilities—the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Air Carrier Access Act and more—have been in place for decades. However, people with disabilities continue to face discrimination and a lack of equal access in almost every aspect of daily life, including in employment, education, healthcare, housing, transportation and goods and services.

On top of existing and longstanding barriers to equal access, the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to ravage communities across the Nation, has disproportionately impacted people with disabilities. In general, the millions of Americans with pre-existing medical conditions are at higher risk of severe complications from COVID-19, and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are three times more likely to die from COVID-19 compared to others diagnosed with the disease. Further, people with disabilities are more likely than the general public to live in congregate settings, rely on public transportation and depend on caregivers who come into their homes, all of which increase the risk of exposure to COVID-19. Moreover, many students and employees with disabilities have lost access to reasonable accommodations at school and in the workplace.

It is therefore imperative that you expeditiously fill political appointments across the federal government with disability policy experts to address these challenges, including appointees with a diversity of lived experiences. To that end, we urge you and your administration to hire people with disabilities at all levels of the executive branch—from the Cabinet down—and across all departments and agencies. We also urge the swift appointment of highly qualified candidates in

key positions, including at the National Council on Disability (NCD), Access Board, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Community Living, HHS Office of Civil Rights, Division of Civil Rights at the Department of Justice, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services and Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Education. Additionally, we hope you will fulfill your campaign promise of appointing a Director of Disability Policy within the Domestic Policy Council on Day 1 and encourage you to appoint the chair of the NCD at the same time. Finally, it is crucial that the Biden-Harris administration involve people with disabilities at all stages of policy development.

Thank you for your commitment to hiring a diverse workforce and ensuring the rights of people with disabilities are at the forefront of all decision-making and executive actions throughout your administration. We look forward to supporting your efforts and working with you along the way.

Sincerely,



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Jim R. Langevin
Member of Congress