

Written Testimony
“Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility
in U.S. Diplomacy and Development”
U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Washington, D.C.
Tuesday, July 26, 2022

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, Members of the Committee, I am delighted to speak with you today about the State Department’s progress – and challenges – on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). I am thrilled to be joined by my counterpart, Neneh Diallo, from USAID.

Secretary Blinken appointed me as the Department’s first stand-alone Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer fifteen months ago. Since that time, the Department has made significant strides to advance DEIA within our organization and build the foundation for future success. This foundation will ensure the Department’s DEIA initiatives get implemented in a sustainable way. Our steadfast goal is to support equity and inclusivity across our entire workforce and ensure our workforce knows and understands what we are doing and why.

It is not enough to recruit and support a workforce that draws from the diversity of our nation. We must also leverage the strength of our diverse talents to make certain we have the strongest foreign policy to meet 21st century challenges. This is how we best serve the American people. Therefore, we must examine our organization holistically to identify where inequities exist not only in terms of whom we hire, but also in terms of who stays and who advances.

Our approach is two-pronged: first, focus on **structural changes** to policy, practice, and procedures so that opportunities are no longer based on “who you know” but what you bring to the table. We do this work by identifying and removing barriers to a truly merit-based system for every employee. Second, we are focused on **changing the culture** so that employees feel truly included, seen, and encouraged to speak up when they have ideas to offer or want to flag concerns.

The Department is committed to using an evidence-based approach to identify barriers to equitable, merit-based hiring and career outcomes. By examining red flags in our data, we can identify where potential inequities exist and recommend

specific actions to improve how we do business. This is why my first priority as Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer was to create a DEIA Data Working Group. This team of analysts and subject matter experts from multiple offices coordinate the Department's vital barrier analysis work.

Since standing up this unprecedented group a year ago, we've compiled a demographic baseline of the Department of State, by rank, job category, and bureau. As a result, we now have a more accurate picture of who and where we are as an organization. And we can now better identify where we have work to do to keep us unified in terms of opportunity, earned recognition and support. With this established baseline we can also evaluate the effectiveness of our initiatives and track our progress. Data analysis is key to guiding, measuring, and sustaining an effective DEIA program, and I want to thank Congress for providing the resources needed for this important work.

Another change I am excited to tell you about is our work to ensure that advancing DEIA is now tied to Foreign Service promotions and Civil Service performance evaluations. Secretary Blinken has made clear his expectation that DEIA work is not just on me, my office, or for employees working in human resources. It must not be limited to employees from historically underrepresented groups or the most junior among our ranks. Everyone must play a part in advancing DEIA as an organizational culture. Why? Because it will make the Department of State stronger, improve the quality of our foreign policy, model the values we promote abroad, and ensure the best rise to the top because of their merit.

To hold employees accountable for this, the Department has created a dedicated DEIA core precept for the Foreign Service and DEIA work elements for the Civil Service. This was necessary, because while the Department has always valued and included DEIA principles as an element of earlier core precepts and work elements, if employees demonstrated achievements in other areas within the precept, their lack of attention to DEIA could be overlooked. By tying promotions more strongly to advancing DEIA, we have now increased the incentive for every Department employee to forward this vital work.

While the dedicated core precept provides a way to recognize positive contributions to the DEIA mission, we must also do more to improve accountability and transparency, and root out toxic workplace behavior such as

discrimination, including harassment and bullying. As the Department has made significant strides to educate employees on how to address toxic behavior, and reports of harassment have increased, staffing to investigate and respond has not. The Department's FY23 budget includes a request for new positions and funding to create an Anti-Bullying Program and to properly staff our Anti-Harassment Program so that we can correct toxic behaviors and address situations before they reach the level of a formal complaint. It is imperative that our workplaces eliminate toxic behavior so that everyone has the same opportunity to do their best work in service to the American people.

I am pleased to report the Department completed development of its five-year DEIA Strategic Plan. It is the most forward-leaning, ambitious, and robust DEIA Strategic Plan the Department has ever created. It includes input from dozens of offices and hundreds of employees from every segment of the workforce. This includes local DEIA Councils, Employee Organizations, Locally Employed Staff, Eligible Family Member staff, contract staff, the Civil Service, and Foreign Service Specialists and Generalists. My office will oversee the Plan's implementation and has formed an Implementation Team, made up of representatives from bureaus and offices with responsibility for action items in the Plan. The Team's first meeting was in June, and it will meet quarterly to ensure goals and objectives are being met within the outlined timeframes and ensure the Plan is properly resourced. In addition, the State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan includes a strategic objective on promoting DEIA as a component of revitalizing our workforce.

Lastly, I would also like to mention the Department's recent changes to the Foreign Service generalist exam process. The Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT) served as a distorted barrier of entry into the Foreign Service because it favored candidates who had the resources to hone their standardized testing skills on niche topics. Further, the FSOT has never been a predictor of future job performance. There are many successful Foreign Service Officers and career ambassadors serving today whose entry requirements did not include taking the FSOT. In essence, our analysis showed that the FSOT served as an initial stage to reduce the volume of candidates to a more manageable number to determine who to advance to the Foreign Service Oral Assessment (FSOA). The Oral Assessment has always been the true method of evaluating a candidate's skills and abilities to succeed in the Foreign Service.

I am pleased the Department made changes to the Foreign Service generalist selection process. Starting last month, the Department now takes a more holistic approach by factoring a candidate's FSOT test performance along with their skills and experience when deciding who will advance to the FSOA. For those candidates with valuable and relevant skills and experience but less practice at taking standardized tests, this change allows the Department to look at all of a candidate's strengths. No amount of skill or experience will cancel out a low FSOT score. Likewise, candidates with high FSOT scores, but inadequate experience or skills, are also unlikely to advance to the FSOA. This change takes a comprehensive view of all candidates, levels the playing field and allows the Department to examine more candidates from a wider variety of backgrounds, using better and more predictive assessment information and criteria.

While the changes we have implemented in this short amount of time exceeded my expectations, we have much more work to do. The findings in the recently released GAO report "Additional Actions Needed to Improve Workplace Diversity and Inclusion" are consistent with the initiatives my staff and I lead, as we rally more Department employees to join us in this work.

I am grateful to this Committee for its attention to this decades-long issue at the State Department. We will continue the work until we have a workforce that truly reflects and leverages the diverse talents of the nation we represent. Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to speak today. I look forward to your questions.