August 27, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
H-232 U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-230 U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-221 U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
H-204 U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

We write to inform you that Congressional Black Associates (CBA) and the Senate Black Legislative Staff Caucus (SBLSC) have convened the Joint Congressional Staff Task Force on Racial Justice and Reform to prepare a report on legislation proposed during the 116th Congress that we believe will begin to address systems of injustice in America.

Like many Americans, we believe we are in a pivotal moment in our nation’s history. The death of George Floyd and the mass protests against racial injustice in the subsequent months have forced America to reckon with the nation we have been and the nation we wish to become.

This moment is important because George Floyd is far from the first Black American whose death animated a movement. It was the brutal lynching of Emmett Till in 1955 that moved a generation of young Black Americans to organize during the Civil Rights Movement to call on America to complete its unfinished work to create “a more perfect union.”\(^1\) Similarly, the deaths of Trayvon Martin in 2012 and Michael Brown in 2014 moved many young Black Americans to organize during the ongoing Movement for Black Lives. George Floyd joined a long list of Black Americans whose lives were cut short by racially motivated violence in recent years: Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, Korryn Gaines, Tamir Rice, and countless others.

In addition to repeated exposure to racist violence on cable news and social media, our work as active participants in our nation’s federal policy making process involves examining the endless

\(^1\) U.S. Constitution, pmbl.
ways in which Black Americans suffer worse economic and public health outcomes than white Americans. In the past six months, we have witnessed COVID-19 decimate our communities, and other communities of color, due to decades of unaddressed inequities in public health. From New Orleans to Flint, we have seen many in our communities poisoned and killed by our nation’s crumbling infrastructure. And lastly, we have borne witness to the increasingly tight budgets of our communities’ public schools and institutions of higher education.

The duality of our lived experiences as Black Americans and participants in the federal policy making process forces us to reconcile our nation’s past and present on a daily basis. For example, some of the office buildings in which we work are named after self-avowed racists. When we walk the corridors of the U.S. Capitol, we are aware that a largely minority support staff still maintains a building that was built by the hands of enslaved Black laborers. While we help write the laws that govern the United States, we still live in a society that treats us and our families as second-class citizens.

The Joint Congressional Staff Task Force on Racial Justice and Reform rests on a foundation laid by those who came before us. In his final words to America, the late Congressman, activist and Founding Father John Lewis called on all Americans “to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe.” CBA and SBLSC have taken these words to heart.

To develop our report, the Joint Congressional Staff Task Force on Racial Justice and Reform will call on its network of Black Capitol Hill alumni, and engage with scholars, activists, and stakeholders in our communities. CBA and SBLSC have represented the interests of Black congressional staff for decades: CBA since its founding in 1980, and SBLSC since its founding in 1977. Our organizations have fought to help our members advance their careers on Capitol Hill and beyond and we have fought to ensure that the voices of our communities are represented in vital public policy discussions, we consider the Task Force to be a natural progression of those efforts. We understand that traditionally Hill staff have not done something like this before, but after much thought and consideration, we felt this would be the best course of action to inform Members of Congress of expectations that Black Hill staff have in order to address systemic inequities and racial injustices afflicting the Black community.

Days prior to his assassination in 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a speech that contained what would become one of his most quoted pearls of wisdom: “We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” We know that the arc of the moral universe does not bend on its own. Every individual American and every American institution must bend our nation further in the direction of justice.

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Enclosed you will find a preliminary report detailing the initial policy areas that we will investigate. Our aim is to leverage our access and privilege to address these long-standing, systemic problems in our society, and we hope you will find in us willing partners in the effort to move our nation forward.

Sincerely,

The Joint Congressional Staff Task Force on Racial Justice and Reform

Congressional Black Associates

Senate Black Legislative Staff Caucus