

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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July 29, 2020

Dr. Marcia McNutt
President
National Academy of Sciences
500 Fifth Street N.W.
Washington, D.C 20001

Dear Dr. McNutt,

As our nation confronts the racism that has pervaded so much of our public life since its founding, it is incumbent upon each of us to do what we can to address the systems that perpetuate inequities within our own sphere of influence. As Chairwoman of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, I am committed to ensuring talented minds from all backgrounds are free to pursue careers in science, engineering, and medicine.

One way to broaden participation in these fields is to shine a light on the accomplishments of overlooked pioneers. For example, through passage of the *Hidden Figures Congressional Gold Medal Act*, Congress bestowed its highest civilian honor to finally acknowledge the contributions of black women working as mathematicians and engineers at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration during the space race. Research has shown the importance of role models for attracting students from marginalized groups to pursue studies in the scientific, engineering, and medical disciplines. We also know that having mentors and cohort groups can be crucial, and we must continue to invest in these and other policies and programs that help students from all backgrounds succeed in those fields.

However, the harder work is ensuring that these talented students from already marginalized groups are not later pushed out of their chosen field due to the difficulty of enduring hostility and having to navigate cumulative disadvantages imposed by a system rife with biases. We must meet this moment in our history with a rigorous and thoughtful analysis of the extent to which the U.S. scientific enterprise perpetuates systemic inequities to the detriment of society as whole, as well as how those inequities are manifested.

I am writing to ask that the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine assemble a distinguished group of individuals to assess the influence of systemic racism in academia on the careers of individuals belonging to racial and ethnic groups historically underrepresented in the scientific, technical, and medical workforce. In selecting members of the

study committee and throughout all stages of the study, I encourage the Academies to engage with organizations with expertise in identifying and addressing systemic inequities in science, engineering, and medicine. The study should include the following:

1. Review of the research on the ways in which systemic racism in the fields of science, engineering, and medicine affects individuals on college and university campuses, in research labs and field sites, at hospitals/medical centers, and in other research and learning environments.
2. Examination of the extent to and ways in which systemic racism in research and learning environments influences the recruitment, retention, and advancement of historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups pursuing scientific, engineering, technical, and medical careers. The study should include an assessment of variations across disciplines and of the ways in which impacts are compounded for individuals belonging to multiple marginalized groups.
3. Examination of the extent to which systemic racism in science, engineering, and medicine has shaped research agendas and limited the breadth of research topics and the diversity of researchers funded by the federal government.
4. Identification and analysis of policies, strategies, and practices that have been the most successful in preventing and addressing systemic racism in these settings.
5. Identification and analysis of promising policies, strategies, and practices for restoring the careers of individuals affected by systemic racism in the scientific, technical, and medical workforce.
6. Identification of principles for sustainable organizational culture change to address systemic racism and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in scientific, technical, and medical studies and careers.

I appreciate your attention to this request. To discuss this request in more detail please have your staff contact Sara Barber of the Committee's Majority staff at (202) 225-6375. Your assistance in this matter is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Chairwoman
Committee on Science, Space, and
Technology