



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

To: Director Catherine M. Russell
White House Presidential Personnel Office (PPO)
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Director Russell,

The undersigned co-chairs of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Employment and Training Task Force are writing to you today to reiterate the critical importance of prioritizing the placement of proven professionals with disabilities and those with lived experience, especially those from intersectional identities, into positions of leadership throughout your Administration.

[CCD](#) is the largest coalition of national organizations working together to advocate for national public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society free from racism, ableism, sexism, and xenophobia, as well as LGBTQ+ based discrimination and religious intolerance; that enhances the civil rights and quality of life of all people with disabilities and their families; and that reflects the values of the Americans with Disabilities Act and all civil rights law.

Our coalition works to support the 61 million people living with disabilities in America today. The pandemic and the associated economic crisis have severely impacted the disability community, with much of the worst burden falling on the 12 million people of color with disabilities who have suffered the most from COVID-19. To face these challenges and solve these problems, the Biden Administration has publicly committed to build a cabinet that will “look like the country.” While our organizations are grateful to see the proven leaders chosen by the Administration to lead the efforts of the [Administration on Community Living \(ACL\)](#) as well as the appointees to the [COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force](#), many other leadership positions remain unfilled. We understand the unprecedented challenges that your Administration faced throughout the transition process and the bottleneck created by the Senate confirmation process.

However, there are several critical agency leadership positions that need to be filled immediately if the work of building back better for Americans with disabilities is to truly begin. For example, there has not been a Senate-confirmed Assistant Secretary of Disability Employment Policy since February 2015. While the career civil servants of the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) have done incredible work for the past 6 years, there is a considerable risk that Department of Labor (DOL) led economic recovery efforts will exclude people with disabilities unless there is an appointee to have a seat at the decision-making table. Further, the nation's vocational rehabilitation system, including agencies in 54 states and territories, cannot move forward with new policies or better supports for jobseekers with disabilities until an Administrator is appointed to lead the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). Likewise, leadership is needed at the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) if our nation is to meet the educational needs of the 6.5 million students with disabilities in America's public school system. Our Task Force as well as other Task Forces of CCD are concerned about the long-term ramifications of this past year on the 3.5 million students of color with disabilities who face multiple forms of oppression as well as tending to be over identified and under resourced for special education services. At the same time, people with disabilities live in poverty at more than twice the rate of people without disabilities, hence the deep concern about access to education and jobs for this population.

The idea that "Personnel is policy" has been an adage in Washington for decades now. Throughout the campaign last year, the Biden-Harris team prioritized, in an unprecedented fashion, connecting with the more than 38.3 million eligible voters with disabilities. The time has now come for that commitment to be made clear in both policy actions and personnel appointments.

Our Task Force and our constituent organizations want to assist you in your work however we can. As such, we would like to request the opportunity to speak with you virtually about these specific appointments and in whatever ways our collected organizations can support these efforts. Please let us know whenever, where and how we can best connect. Thank you for what you are doing and we look forward to speaking with you soon.

Regards,

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