



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee Chairwoman Xochitl Torres Small (D-NM)

Building a Diverse and Inclusive Workforce to Meet the Homeland Security Mission

February 27, 2020

We are here today to discuss the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to cultivate a diverse and inclusive workforce. Across the Department's wide and varied missions one thing remains constant: the importance of a workforce that is as diverse as the homeland it seeks to protect.

The Committee last held a hearing on this topic in 2009 after learning that racial minorities constituted only 20 percent of the DHS workforce and 10 percent of leadership positions. At that time the Committee heard from the Department about some of its efforts to recruit and retain more diverse talent.

Ten years later those numbers have improved, with higher representation of minorities, women, and people with disabilities in the DHS workforce. But the Department still has a way to go to achieve equal representation across the Department and increase the number of minorities and women in leadership positions.

Vital to ensuring that these goals are met is a commitment to better understanding the barriers and developing plans to address them. In some areas, the Department has taken steps to do this. In 2014, a DHS review of women in law enforcement found that the Department employed fewer female law enforcement officers than the rest of the federal government. The review found that some women felt the working environment forced them to choose between their career and having a family.

Additionally, a 2018 study of why women leave the U.S. Coast Guard found that women were leaving the component at much higher rates than men. The study noted that this was due in part to gender bias and a belief that women had to work twice as hard to prove themselves as men, and were not given the same advancement opportunities.

In response, DHS began implementing a mentorship program for women in law enforcement positions last year and had 36 pairs of mentors/mentees. Currently women hold, on average, 25 percent of positions in DHS law enforcement agencies so I look forward to seeing if this new mentorship program helps the Department retain and promote more women in those positions.

The Department also struggles to ensure that its most crucial mission areas incorporate the views of traditionally underserved populations. In areas like emergency management, border security, and domestic terrorism prevention, it's vital that the Department proactively consider and directly communicate with all communities. Confusion, miscommunication, and distrust in emergency situations can lead to unnecessary loss of life.

Unfortunately we saw this play out in the delayed disaster assistance in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria due to an insufficient number of bilingual employees. FEMA's lack of Spanish speaking employees caused problems throughout the disaster response, and contributed to delays in getting assistance to the people who needed it most. This serves as a reminder of the importance of including people with diverse backgrounds in the formulation of plans, policies, and procedures.

DHS's mission is best served by ensuring that women, minorities, and people with disabilities not only have the opportunity to participate but to lead.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about how DHS is working to identify the various challenges its components face in creating a diverse and inclusive working environment and how the Department is meeting those challenges.

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