

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 2, 2016

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW, Room 7125
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

We write to you to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issue a report on federal advertising contracts and subcontracts with minority-owned publications, public relations firms, advertising agencies, and media companies. News outlets and media companies owned or published by people of color are critical to ensuring that diverse viewpoints are presented to the American people. As one of the largest advertisers in the United States, the federal government should play an active role in ensuring that minority-owned media outlets have fair opportunities to compete for and be awarded federal advertising contracts.

Executive Order 13170, signed October 2000, directs agencies to “take an aggressive role in ensuring substantial minority-owned entities’ participation” in Federal advertising-related procurements. In 2007, GAO examined spending on advertising contracts with minority-owned business by five agencies—the Department of Defense (DOD), Department of the Treasury, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Department of the Interior, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).¹ During this process, GAO discovered that from FY2001 through FY2005 only 5 percent of the \$4.3 billion available for advertising campaigns went to Small Business Administration’s (SBA) 8(a) and small disadvantaged business (SDB) programs and minority-owned businesses.² The report showed that minority-owned businesses received just 0.1 percent of the DOD’s obligations, 0.6 of Treasury’s obligations and 4.6 percent of Interior’s obligations during that timeframe.

News outlets and media companies are responsible for the dissemination of information to the American people, and when minority groups lack representation in the media, their stories are often written by others or remain untold altogether. Federal contracts help minority-owned media companies continue their service of providing unique stories and a perspective that diverges from major media outlets. Additionally, federal advertisements in minority-owned publications help keep their readers informed about significant information and opportunities within the government.

On September 30, 2016, GAO published a report examining federal spending on contracts for advertising, finding that an average of \$1 billion was spent annually on federal

¹ Government Accountability Office, *GAO-07-877: Federal Advertising Contracts* (July 2007) (available at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07877.pdf>)

² Government Accountability Office, *GAO-07-877: Federal Advertising Contracts* (July 2007) (available at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07877.pdf>)

advertising and public relations contracts from FY2006 through FY2015. We ask that you follow this report by investigating how much federal money has been spent on publications, public relations firms, advertising agencies and other media companies that are owned by people of color, whose audiences largely consist of groups that are underrepresented by major media outlets. Given the important need for fair representation of people of color in the media, this report would allow Congress to identify and eliminate potential barriers to equal opportunity of access to federal advertising contracts. We thank you in advance for your attention to this request, and we look forward to your response.

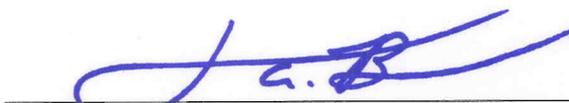
Sincerely,


Robert Menendez


Charles E. Schumer


Kirsten Gillibrand


Mazie Hirono


Cory A. Booker