Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 19, 2026

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Katherine Clark
Democratic Whip
U.S. House of Representatives
H-148, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pete Aguilar
Chair
House Democratic Caucus
1420 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Levin
Chair
Committee on Caucus Rules
2352 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader Jeffries, Whip Clark, Chair Aguilar, and Chair Levin:

As Members and Members-elect of the 120th Congress, we write to urge our caucus to open the halls of opportunity for members who choose to pursue legislative leadership as their contribution to the caucus and the American people by amending our Caucus rules so that subcommittee leadership is chosen on a full range of qualifications, not seniority alone.

As the American people are struggling with soaring costs, inaccessible healthcare, and rampant corruption in the White House, now is not the time for wait-your-turn politics. Americans issued a clarion call for new leadership on November 3rd – and they entrusted Democrats with the power to deliver it. The American people have too much on the line for us to gamble away this opportunity from within a fundamentally unfair system. Treating seniority alone as a qualification for leadership in this body does not create a level playing field. Far from it. That is why we propose a different way. That is why these important leadership positions should not just go by default to our oldest members with the safest seats – they need to go to our most qualified members. And while we acknowledge that work has been done to expand the influence members can have through an array of leadership positions that do not come with a gavel, we believe there is a great opportunity to better utilize the wealth of talent members bring. We are the caucus of opportunity just as we seek to make America the land of opportunity. It is time to put this caucus in overdrive and help repair the damage this Administration has inflicted on this country.

Under current Democratic rules, subcommittee leadership is determined largely by seniority. Under Caucus Rule 28, members of each committee bid for open subcommittee slots in order of full-committee seniority, or subcommittee seniority on Appropriations. In most cases, the post goes to whoever is highest on the list and wants it. That system rewards long service, and while experience does have real value, it cannot be our top and only consideration. Seniority is no guarantee that the Member has the competence or expertise to develop and advance the bold, robust policy agenda that this moment demands. There are Members who have been waiting for the opportunity to have one of these posts for 10 to 15 years due to the current rules.

There are seen and unseen barriers to a more inclusive leadership structure. Seniority tends to favor older members from safe seats, who have had long, uninterrupted tenures. As a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, I recognize the history behind why we would support a seniority-based system, which was put into place in a time when no Black members were included in party leadership. But we are seeing significant changes in the diversity of our body – regionally, politically, educationally, and in experience. Members from battleground districts, members who have family caregiving obligations, and younger members who arrived more recently rarely reach the top of a seniority list, even when they bring deep expertise, fresh ideas, and represent a significant constituency of this country. Yet they are often the members who know best what voters in competitive districts need from us. Creating a truly level playing field for all members, not just those who have served in this body the longest is good for this country, this Caucus, and good for our chances of holding the seats that decide the majority. Moreover, we should be embracing turnover in this body. We must evolve alongside the needs and values of the people we serve. Turnover is what happens when you are seeding a new crop, and our soil has to be rich and nutritious if we are going to grow towards the sun.

We believe the Caucus should ask itself a simple question: does the current system serve the needs of the American people, or does it merely serve the members who have been here the longest? In our view, the current structure puts seniority ahead of results – and that must change. We need a system that functions as a meritocracy.

We therefore respectfully request that:

1. The Committee on Caucus Rules hold an open discussion on subcommittee leadership selection before rules for the 120th Congress are adopted, with an opportunity for any Member or Member-elect to be heard.
2. The Committee consider amendments to Rule 28 that would allow members to stand for subcommittee leadership positions and make their case to their committee colleagues, with selection based on merit rather than seniority alone.
3. Any proposed amendment be brought before the full Democratic Caucus for debate and a vote.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this proposal with you and with the Committee on Caucus Rules in the coming weeks. Thank you for your leadership and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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