



March 10, 2022

The Honorable Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2240 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC

Dear Representative Johnson,

Thank you for your March 2, 2022 letter to President Biden regarding federal investments in black-owned and operated media and advertising firms, specifically those involving COVID-19 funds. President Biden has asked the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to respond on his behalf.

On June 1, at the centennial of the Tulsa Race Massacre, President Biden announced a new goal: increasing the share of federal contracts going to small disadvantaged businesses, including Black-owned and operated businesses. The announcement was part of the President's Day One Executive Order 13985, which directed agencies to address ways to make federal contracting opportunities more accessible to all eligible firms.

However, even before President Biden's announcement on June 1, the Biden-Harris Administration was working to advance equity in federal contracting generally, and as part of its COVID-19 response. One of the best examples is the HHS COVID-19 public education campaign (PEC) – a multi-million dollar national initiative focused on increasing public confidence in, and uptake of COVID-19 vaccines and boosters and other COVID-19 mitigation measures.

From Day One of the Biden-Harris Administration through April 30, 2022, the HHS COVID-19 PEC is projected to spend about 18 percent (approximately \$65,000,000) of its total paid media budget targeting Black audiences. This means that the total spend for this single federal campaign is well beyond parity for the Black community, which makes up approximately 13 percent of the U.S. population.

Of the entire paid media budget, more than 5.5 percent (approximately \$20,000,000) was spent on Black-owned and operated media (e.g., TV One, National Newspaper Publishers Association, National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters, and Oprah Winfrey Network). The Government Accountability Office Report mentioned in your letter cited 1.02 percent as the level of investment for advertising in Black-owned and operated businesses by the federal government

over a five-year period; the more than 5.5 percent spent by the public education campaign -- a single federal campaign -- is roughly 450 percent more. Of the HHS COVID-19 public education campaign total paid media budget, about 12.5 percent (approximately \$45,000,000) was spent on Black-targeted media (e.g., BET, The Breakfast Club, and Fox Soul) -- that is, media that has extensive Black reach but isn't Black-owned or operated. In other words, approximately 30 percent of the total amount of paid media spent on targeting Black audiences was spent on Black-owned and operated media. In order to maximize impact in the Black community, we recognize the importance of investing in both Black-owned and operated media and Black-targeted media.

The HHS COVID-19 PEC is not only making significant investments in Black-owned and operated media but has also hired a Black-owned and operated agency, Creative Marketing Resources, to oversee the creative development, targeting, and media buying of the advertising that targets Black audiences.

Creative Marketing Resource's experience and expertise in this space has helped HHS develop culturally resonant creative products and make strategic media buys to maximize our impact in the Black community. Media dollars go directly to the media vendors. The primary contractor and subcontractors who help buy the media do not receive a markup on money spent for advertising.

The results of the HHS COVID-19 PEC's investment in Black-owned, operated, and targeted media speak for themselves. Through paid media, earned media, social media, paid partnerships, community events, testimonials, and the deployment of more than 17,000 trusted messengers (e.g., physicians, barbers, and faith leaders) in communities nationwide, the HHS COVID-19 PEC has closed the disparity gap in vaccination rates. Currently, [according to the Kaiser Family Foundation](#), 72 percent of Black Americans age 18 and older have had at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, and 73 percent of white Americans age 18 and older have had at least one dose.

As part of the HHS COVID-19 PEC, leaders across government have been traveling across the country to educate people about the importance of getting vaccinated. Recently, Secretary Becerra [traveled to Jacksonville, Florida](#), to participate in a roundtable discussion hosted by one of the HHS COVID-19 PEC's paid national partners -- Black Men Engaged. Additional HHS COVID-19 PEC national paid partners include Jack and Jill of America, Inc., National Medical Association -- Cobb Institute, Women Missionary Society Foundation, The Links, Black Women's Agenda, and the National Black Nurses Association. The roundtable in Jacksonville is one of approximately 50 community events the HHS COVID-19PEC has held with Black communities across the country.

Examples of other HHS COVID-19 PEC efforts include: interviews with National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Dr. Anthony Fauci and other trusted messengers on The Breakfast Club, Joe Madison, The Steve Harvey Morning Show and other outlets; a 17-city bus tour in pockets of the country with significant Black populations; a conversation hosted by First Lady Dr. Jill Biden and singer-songwriter Ciara about the importance of vaccinating children; a paid partnership with Twitter, Opendorse and college athletes tied to March Madness; and [a](#)

[campaign ad](#) featuring a Black pediatrician mom explaining why it's important to vaccinate children against COVID-19. To see additional HHS COVID-19 PEC ads, go [here](#).

The work of the HHS COVID-19 PEC is not the only example of the Biden-Harris Administration and HHS's effort to advance equity as part of the COVID-19 response. Through a \$7.3 billion American Rescue Plan investment, HHS has vaccinated millions against COVID-19 at more than 1,400 community health centers nationwide. More than 90 percent of community health center patients are individuals or families living at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (about \$46,000 per year for a family of three in most states) and at least 60 percent are racial/ethnic minorities. You can read more about our efforts to advance equity during the COVID-19 response [here](#).

The Department's work to ensure equity in our COVID-19 response and other health and human services efforts is ongoing. We will continue to work hard to invest in and build trust with all Americans while improving and saving lives.

If you or your staff have any follow up questions about the work that HHS is doing to advance equity as part of the COVID-19 response, including the HHS COVID-19 PEC, please reach out to the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Legislation at (202) 690-7627.

Sincerely,

*Melanie Anne Egorin*

Melanie Anne Egorin, PhD  
Assistant Secretary for Legislation  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Cc:

The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton

The Honorable Barbara Lee

The Honorable Val Demings

The Honorable Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.

The Honorable Dwight Evans

The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson

The Honorable Gwen Moore

The Honorable Juan Vargas

The Honorable Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick

The Honorable Karen Bass

The Honorable Steven Horsford

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