



March 8, 2021

The Honorable Nydia Velázquez  
2302 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steve Stivers  
2234 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives,

Intellectual Property Owners Association (IPO) writes to express strong support for the Inventor Diversity for Economic Advancement Act (IDEA Act) of 2021, which would require the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) to collect demographic data from patent applicants on a voluntary basis.

As you know, IPO is an international trade association representing a “big tent” of diverse companies, law firms, service providers, and individuals in all industries and fields of technology that own, or are interested in, intellectual property (IP) rights. IPO advocates for effective, affordable, and balanced IP rights and offers a wide array of services, including supporting member interests relating to legislative and international issues; analyzing current IP issues; providing information and educational services; and disseminating information to the public on the importance of intellectual property. IPO’s mission is to promote high quality and enforceable IP rights and predictable legal systems for all industries and technologies. Our vision is the global acceleration of innovation, creativity, and investment necessary to improve lives.

IPO has a strategic objective to foster diverse engagement in the innovation and to integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion in all its work. IPO Education Foundation (IPOEF), the association’s affiliated 501 (c)(3) foundation, has a strategic objective to promote innovation and creation by, within, and for underrepresented communities.

Underrepresentation of certain sectors of society in the patent system is a particularly important issue to IPO and IPOEF because disparity in opportunities to obtain patents impairs economic growth and American innovation. In 2019, Sandra Nowak from 3M Company, a member of IPO’s Women in IP Committee, testified to the Subcommittee on Intellectual Property about the need for gender parity in innovation and strategies companies can implement to close the patenting gap. In the same year, IPO released its [“Gender Diversity in Innovation Toolkit,”](#) a blueprint for companies to assess and cultivate gender parity in innovation. Since the release of the Toolkit, IPO has held several webinars discussing the lack of diversity in innovation.

IPO Education Foundation has created a webinar series to teach high school and college students about innovation and creation featuring topics such as IP fundamentals, careers in STEM, and women innovators. The Foundation's *Stroke of Genius*® podcast includes stories from underrepresented communities, stories highlighting immigrant businesses, the need for innovation

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## INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION

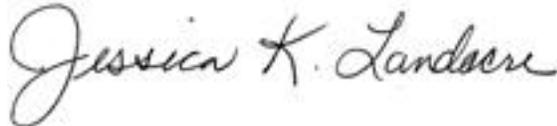
to improve food deserts and food insecurities, and how poems and artwork about racial inequality can be protected.

Closing the diversity gap in innovation for *all* underrepresented groups is vitally important. Information about the diversity gap that has been published by the World Intellectual Property Organization, the USPTO, and scholars such as Dr. Lisa Cook have inspired IPO and IPOEF to evaluate the scope of the problem and how to facilitate more diverse participation in the patent system. IPO's Women in IP Committee is currently revising the Toolkit to focus on assessing and improving diversity of all types, but this is much more challenging than determining gender due to the lack of demographic data available on inventors. Collecting this demographic data will allow the USPTO and other organizations to determine where the gaps are and to work toward closing them in the same way that organizations are working toward gender parity.

A 2018 report by The Quality of Opportunity Project indicated that "if women, minorities, and low-income children were to invent patented technology at the same rate as white men from high-income (top 20%) households, the rate of innovation in America would quadruple." Dr. Cook's scholarship indicates that increasing participation in inventing by underrepresented groups could increase U.S. GDP by as much as 4.4%. We support the IDEA Act because collecting data is the crucial first step toward addressing underrepresentation. It is imperative to collect information to allow us to understand the problem and track progress toward greater inclusion of all underrepresented groups.

We hope the Senate will pass the IDEA Act as soon as possible. We stand ready to assist in any way we can.

Sincerely,



Jessica Landacre  
Executive Director