



10 May 2019

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
Chairwoman, Committee on Science, Space and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Madam Chairwoman:

IEEE-USA applauds the House of Representatives Committee on Science, Space, and Technology on the introduction of two bipartisan bills supporting underrepresented women and minorities in STEM fields. For far too long, women and minorities have faced many barriers as they attempt to reach academic and research goals. The STEM Opportunities Act is an excellent step to addressing some of these issues, while the Hidden Figures Congressional Gold Medal Act recognizes the women who provided tremendous contributions to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

H.R. 2528, the STEM Opportunities Act will improve conditions for women and minorities who wish to enter and pursue STEM careers. By structuring federal research agency policies to support caregivers, the bill seeks to avoid forcing researchers to choose between work and family responsibilities. The bill also shines a light on the disparity between the number of women and minorities who apply for federal research grants and those which proportionally receive these grants. By requiring data collection regarding the numbers of minorities who receive STEM grant funding, IEEE-USA hopes that agencies and granting institutions will begin to address some of the systemic issues that must change for these highly capable researchers to receive the funding they deserve.

H.R. 1396, the Hidden Figures Congressional Gold Medal Act recognizes the accomplishments of African American women in our Nation's space race who have largely been overlooked until recently. The National Advisory Committee's decision to hire these women to serve as computers for the space program meant that their work was crucial to the successes of our early space program, from Alan Shepard's Freedom 7 mission to the Apollo missions. Their work was both essential to the success of the space program and incredibly impressive in its own right. This belated honor is well deserved by these women.

IEEE-USA applauds the House Science, Space and Technology Committee for seeking to expand research and educational opportunities for women and minorities, addressing institutional and cultural barriers they face, and making conditions better for women and minorities from the start of their careers as undergraduate students through to their receiving grant funding as faculty. The United States needs to find ways to encourage more women and minority students to pursue STEM careers. By identifying barriers preventing applicants from pursuing STEM degrees and addressing the ways in which they are denied research grants, these bills are a great start to allowing more students to succeed in STEM fields.

Sincerely,

Thomas Coughlin
2019 IEEE-USA President