

**Justin Vail, DPC SAP for Democracy and Civic Participation**  
**Opening remarks for U.S. Delegation ICCPR presentation to the**  
**Committee**

*October 17, 2023*

Madame Chairperson and Members of the Committee, my name is Justin Vail, and I serve as Special Assistant to the President for Democracy and Civic Participation at the White House Domestic Policy Council. The Domestic Policy Council is charged with helping to coordinate efforts across the United States Government to develop and implement the Biden-Harris Administration's domestic agenda.

The United States delegation is honored to appear before the Committee to report on our implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. I would like start by reiterating our abiding commitment to the protection and promotion of civil and political rights of all persons, both globally and at home.

Our commitment is reflected in the strong, senior-level delegation that is appearing before you today. You will hear from senior representatives of the federal agencies that play key roles in implementing the laws, policies, programs, and processes that ensure that our commitment to human rights results in tangible progress.

Our system of federalism entrusts governance and responsibilities for protecting human rights across federal, state, and local authorities. Accordingly, we are honored to have two distinguished elected officials—**Attorney General Aaron Ford of the State of Nevada and Mayor Steven Reed of Montgomery, Alabama**—join our delegation, so that we can substantively address as many of the Committee's questions as possible and, where necessary, explain the different authorities held by federal, state, and local officials.

As part of our preparation for this presentation, we sought to meaningfully engage state and local officials, as well as civil society. Over the last year, we hosted several civil society consultations on a wide variety of human rights issues and included nearly 100 participants in each consultation. We have received approximately 120 reports from civil society.

Our delegation thanks the members of civil society who joined us just yesterday for a productive consultation here in Geneva—their engagement has informed our preparation for this presentation and, more importantly, their engagement strengthens our efforts to advance and protect human rights each and every day.

We take pride in the progress made to date during the Biden-Harris Administration, and the lives that have been improved as a result. We also recognize that there is a great deal more to be accomplished. On his first day in office, President Biden directed an historic, whole-of-government effort to address systemic racism and strengthen support for underserved communities, and we are taking action to prevent discrimination and root out the persistent inequalities in our criminal justice system, and in access to health care, housing, and other aspects of life that are essential to freedom and prosperity.

The Administration is taking action to counter the hate-motivated violence that targets individuals and communities based on what they believe or who they are and that threatens our public safety and democracy.

President Biden established the for the first time a White House Gender Policy Council that leads the Administration's efforts to advance gender equity and equality.

The United States continues to advance our long-standing commitment to uphold our treaty and trust responsibilities and nation-to-nation relationship with Tribal Nations.

President Biden also established the first-ever White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention to reduce gun violence to save lives from the public health crisis of gun violence and implement and expand upon key executive and legislative action, like the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, the most significant bipartisan gun safety legislation in nearly 30 years.

And, for the first time in our nation's history, the Federal Government has made it a goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain Federal investments flow to communities that are underserved and overburdened by pollution and the devastating impacts of climate crisis.

We are also confronting the attacks on our fundamental values and rights that we are experiencing in the United States, including attacks on the right to vote in free and fair elections; on reproductive rights and health care; and against the LGBTQ+ community.

We approach these challenges head on, resolute in our commitment to protecting and advancing human rights. Because great nations do not hide from their history or their faults. They acknowledge them and work to improve with transparency, humility, and perseverance. In doing so, we strengthen our democracy and our societies, we address past wrongs, and provide hope and motivation to human rights defenders across the globe.

We look forward to a constructive and substantive dialogue, and we remain committed to engaging with the Committee and broader

international community as we continue working to advance civil and political rights both domestically and across the globe.