

*A View of House Modernization: Perspectives from the CAO*

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Chairwoman Bice, Ranking Member Kilmer, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today to provide an update on the modernization efforts being conducted by the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and a report on our efforts to support Members and staff during the 118<sup>th</sup> transition. As an organization, CAO always strives to live by our motto: Member Focused. Service Driven.

Through our partnership with the previous Select Committee on Modernization and Committee on House Administration, we have made significant progress in making Congress a more effective, efficient, and transparent institution. Through all our efforts we have always valued your input and support to promote modernization in the House, and today I look forward to highlighting how our joint efforts are supporting Members and staff.

The CAO remains committed to implementing the recommendations put forth by the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress. Roughly 1/3 of the Select Committee's recommendations were focused on the CAO. We have implemented or made significant progress on many as well as projects that came from CAO to modernize processes, systems, and services. Many of your recommendations were centered around the need to improve training for both Members and staff. This is our priority as well; we have expanded and upgraded teaching and professional development in several key areas. We have undertaken these projects recognizing that House offices have unique training needs, including limited time and frequently changing staff positions.

To fulfill the Select Committee's request to offer strategic leadership development for Members, the CAO initiated the Congressional Excellence Program in 2021. The program was piloted in 2022 and has matured to support nearly 25 Congressional offices. It is now poised for growth this year and into the future, building visionary leadership, strategic impact, and better operations throughout a Member's term in Congress. The program's skilled consultants, partner with

Members, building a roadmap for lasting achievement for the Members, their Chiefs, and offices who come together to serve their district and our Nation.

The highly successful CAO Coach program is less than two years old and provides relevant, efficient, and connective training by House staff for House staff. The Coach team has offered 92 in-person and virtual programs, which have had more than 7,000 attendees, and has hosted three D.C.-based, bipartisan conferences for district staff with 966 attendees. To date, the Coaches have conducted more than 1,500 confidential one-on-one appointments with House staff. These confidential consultations allow staff to ask about everything from improving their management skills to advice on talking with their Chief or tracking constituent mail.

The CAO Coach website houses over 340 training videos with over 90 hours on such topics as Academy Nominations, casework, MRAs, and good office processes. There are also “101” level job how-to video series for all major House positions. The site has had over 8,000 users and more than 17,000 video views since the program’s inception.

The Congressional Staff Academy continues to be our training umbrella and hosts classes in many areas including leadership development, technical skills, and mandatory training. Our Staff Academy team continues to evaluate Staff Academy course offerings and assess how we can continue to offer responsive, high-quality courses. They also recently produced a popular new series of videos explaining finance benefits to staff called “Benita Knows Best.”

Working with the Committee, in 2022 the Coaches and the CAO Advocates held five highly successful district staff conferences focusing on training, learning about campus services, and networking. These conferences saw an overwhelming response with 391 Field Representatives, 478 Caseworkers, and 137 District Directors registering. 99.4% of attendees stated they are likely to recommend a future event to their colleagues. We will build on this progress over the next several months with job-specific conferences here in Washington, D.C. and other cities across the country.

We have also continued to expand the resources and support available through the Human Resources (HR) Hub, which currently has over 135 human resource-related documents and links. Of those resources, over 70 were created specifically as best practice guides to help Member offices hire, develop, and retain staff. Since its launch in August of 2021, the best practices documents in the HR Hub have been downloaded over 4,800 times.

We also refined and expanded the popular House Resume Bank to include a New Member Resume Bank. This online portal, available through House.gov, has made it even easier for Member offices to review and select from a diverse pool of applicants. Over 12,000 resumes have been uploaded to the House Resume Bank since April of last year. Additionally, after the November election, the New Member Resume Bank collected over 18,000 resumes which gave Member offices previously untapped access to a wide array of highly qualified candidates.

In the year ahead, we are committed to expanding and updating content on the HR Hub to include a comprehensive set of interactive career paths for Member office staff and specific content for Committee staff.

We are also focused on implementing the Select Committee's recommendation to establish an Intern Resource Office. This is part of our larger effort to support intern onboarding, provide more professional development opportunities, expand training for intern supervisors, and connect these applicants directly with Member, Committee, and Leadership offices.

Through the House Task Force on a Diverse and Talented Workforce, the CAO along with the other Officers examined opportunities to improve benefits, expand professional development opportunities, and improve data about the House workforce. We were able to improve educational benefits, improve workforce data, and expand services to House interns. This year, the task force will continue to focus on launching the House Intern Resource Office, expanding compensation data available to House offices, and focusing on workforce opportunities and practices.

To support this effort, HIR has modernized and accelerated the cloud review process. Members are beginning to see the benefits as more technology tools become available. This includes the authorization of 141 cloud services, including numerous video conferencing and constituent engagement tools. We have also migrated all House offices to Office 365.

We understand that being of service to constituents is a 24/7 responsibility. That is why we implemented the necessary tools for a fully remote work posture during the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to support the tools and systems that allow staff to remote work when necessary and participate in training from anywhere. Even as staff fully return to campus, they've continued to use these virtual meeting tools in their daily work. Over the past six months, there have been more than 150,000 virtual meetings, more than 107,000 virtual phone calls, and more than 1 million files shared for online collaboration.

To fulfill the Select Committee's request to improve the collection of anonymized demographic data, House Information Resources (HIR) partnered with the Office of Payroll and Benefits to develop a custom module that allows staff to voluntarily self-report demographic data during onboarding. This process is very similar to the standard onboarding practices of the Executive Branch. In addition, these teams worked together to develop a custom module in My PayLinks to better inform future House Compensation Survey Studies and provide Members and staff with more insight into the average salaries for various House positions.

Our House Information Resources team continues to provide robust technological support. Our Enterprise Application Teams worked with the Office of Financial Counseling to bring cloud-based expense management tools to the House. These tools let Members and staff sign their expense reimbursement forms electronically and provide significantly greater transparency to the expense reimbursement process. Members can also use their phones to take a picture of their recent travel expenses and automatically submit that receipt for efficient and quick reimbursement. To date, 317 Member offices use MyExpenses and we are in the process of expanding the service to all Member offices and then to Committees and Leadership.

Last Congress, the CAO created the House Digital Service team within House Information Resources. While they are still a small team, they are having a big impact on bringing modern, user-focused solutions to solve unique challenges for Members and staff. So far, they have successfully introduced Quill, implemented cloud-based voting tools for Leadership and Caucus elections, improved constituent engagement tools, and more.

Further, in partnership with the Clerk's Office and at the direction of Speaker McCarthy, the team worked quickly to implement a new Committee scheduling tool to help offices with scheduling and reduce time conflicts.

One of the Select Committee's first recommendations was to improve 508 compliant accessibility on all House websites. By the end of last year, the team had improved the accessibility of a total of 225 compliant House Member websites and achieved a compliance score of, 90 percent. All Member offices are also provided training so they can maintain their 508 compliance. All the website vendors who work with the House have also been requested to meet these accessibility guidelines. Of all the modernization efforts, accessibility has been the most complex challenge since it requires consistent vigilance and management.

We're also focused on modernizing our data centers and associated technology. From safeguarding more than 3,000 House servers, deploying more than 250,000 software patches annually, and other responsibilities that ensure the continuity of Congress, we know these projects are a top priority for leadership. Many of these efforts are behind the scenes. Members don't see them because they just work. But the House, with the support of the Committee on House Administration and the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch Appropriations, has put forward a tremendous effort to expand the resiliency of our data centers and House data no matter where it is stored. We are committed to continuing our work to ensure the integrity of the House's maintenance and operational systems.

Nowhere was our progress in our CAO modernization efforts more apparent than during the recent 118<sup>th</sup> transition. I'd now like to focus on these efforts and how they directly supported Members and staff.

Working at the direction of the House Committee on House Administration, the CAO undertook a number of efforts to make transition as effective and smooth as possible.

Faced with the reality of supporting a transition post reapportionment and redistricting – the first time in a decade – we began planning by undertaking an institution-wide audit to identify all actions needed to fully support impacted Member offices. One of the most significant ways our CAO transition team was able to anticipate Member needs was with the use of geo-mapping technology. This allowed us to forecast the exact technological and geographical impact of redistricting and prepare our D.C. and District Office service providers and our legislative partners, including the Sergeant at Arms and the Clerk’s Office.

Begun during the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, the CAO continued the Transition Aide Program. The program provides Members-elect an opportunity to have a full-time paid aide compensated by the CAO from mid-Nov. to Jan. 2 to support the Member with critical D.C. and District Office setup responsibilities. Because the Aides are paid House employees with House devices, they have easy access to the necessary office setup resources and can complete and coordinate numerous tasks prior to the start of the Congress including staff onboarding, equipment purchases, office floor plans, district office leases, tech and website decisions, and more. This past transition, 71 out of 75 Members participated, and on Jan. 3, 93% of the Aides were hired in their Member offices.

Rather than providing a one-size-fits-all approach to office layouts during transition, we improved our service offering to meet the demands for more modular furniture, like the electric standing desks in Cannon. Our CAO teams will assess how we can offer these popular furniture options across campus.

The CAO has installed WIFI in more than 116 offices thus far, with plans to have it installed in all primary District offices. We estimate this House solution will save offices an average of \$147 a month if they currently have consumer installed WIFI.

This transition we expanded access to bulk purchasing and offered a larger variety of technology items for purchase through the House Tech Store. We also expanded access to our TV Program by adding an additional 112 offices to the Program. Together we were able to provide freshmen Member offices a stipend for technology purchases, with an increase of \$2,100 from the previous transition, available to use at the House Tech Store. We also provided District Office stipends for freshmen Members representing seats created by reapportionment.

At the request of the Committee, CAO Coaches and CAO Customer Advocates, most of them former staffers themselves, were integral in the two-week New Member Orientation. Furthermore, during the 118<sup>th</sup> Congressional Transition the Committee on House Administration requested the CAO implemented a new institution-wide, New Staff Orientation training led by CAO Customer Advocates and Coaches. In collaboration with the Committee, this Orientation provides all new staff with the resources and information they need, including a new comprehensive staff handbook so they can fully support their Member office. As one staffer said in their post-Orientation survey, "... your presentation and accompanying guidance wrapped everything up so neatly while answering many of the questions I've had." Additionally, the Coaches and the CAO Customer Advocates recently came together and created a 70-part New Staff Orientation video series that includes more than two hours of how-to's and other helpful information for both D.C. and District staff.

The Customer Advocates worked closely with Members-Elect as their main point of contact in setting their offices up, answering all their questions, and resolving any problems. The CAO Coaches and Customer Advocates also hosted the NMO training program. The CAO was able to play a larger role in this area because, for the first time, the institution had a team of experienced staff instructors the Committee could call to supplement their efforts.

From the feedback we've gotten, it is clear the Members-Elect felt supported by the institution through the Advocates and Coaches and they built relationships at NMO that will continue to help them discover how to excel at their jobs and how campus services can help them throughout their tenure in Congress.

As we conclude our transition efforts, the CAO is actively seeking feedback from new and returning Members to assess how we can continue to meet and exceed their expectations. Right now, we are surveying new and returning DC offices about their moves. We expect to launch our next survey for District Offices and Committee and Leadership offices this month. We will use these survey results to develop new recommendations and continue to modernize our transition efforts.

While I am incredibly proud of what the CAO has accomplished in our modernization and transition efforts, our work is far from over. In this Congress, the House and this Subcommittee have an opportunity to define how to effectively use our resources. I recommend the Subcommittee establish a transparent process for all stakeholders, which includes representatives from the other House officers, the Subcommittee, the Appropriations Committee, Leadership, and others to turn modernization recommendations into prioritized projects that can be funded through the Modernization's funded account and successfully implemented.

As part of this process, the House should consider how yearly costs need to be factored into future operating budgets. New programs and initiatives need more than startup funds, and they need ongoing operational support to keep them sustainable. We can't do everything at once. But through a strong process, we can focus on Member priorities, the priorities of this Subcommittee, and make sure we maximize the use of these funds on the highest value project that we can deliver.

In closing, I want to thank you again for your continued partnership and support. We take all your recommendations seriously, as they help us to create a CAO that is responsive to the evolving needs of Members and staff. I look forward to responding to your questions.