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**Written Testimony for the United States House of Representatives,
Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Legislative Branch**

Advancing Congressional Modernization in FY2024 Appropriations

Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Espaillat, and members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Zach Graves. I am the Executive Director of Lincoln Network, a market-oriented non-profit working at the intersection of technology, governance, and national security. A key part of our programmatic work has been supporting modernization and capacity building in Congress, with the goal of helping the legislative branch better fulfill its constitutional role to serve the American people.

For the past several years, House leaders have made modernization a historic bipartisan priority. This has taken significant leadership and coordination, including from this Subcommittee (and its Senate counterpart), from the Committee on House Administration, from the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress (and its continuation as the Modernization Subcommittee), and from legislative branch support offices and working groups. My colleagues and I commend this important work, and look forward to working with the cohort of leaders in the 118th Congress.

Importantly, there is still much work to be done. Congress's technical capacity remains far behind where it needs to be to keep up increasing demands, leaving opportunities on the table to greatly improve efficiency and responsiveness, provide a check on the executive branch, and better serve the American people. With this in mind, I have outlined some key reform

recommendations to help advance capacity and modernization in the FY 2024 legislative branch appropriations bill.

First, the Subcommittee should establish an AI Working Group to leverage new generative AI tools in the legislative branch. In recent months, an impressive suite of new generative artificial intelligence tools have come onto the market (including OpenAI's ChatGPT and DALL·E, Anthropic's Claude, Midjourney, and others). Congressional offices are already experimenting with ways to use them. Unlike the somewhat clumsy AIs of the past, these tools can faithfully replicate and substitute for work done by average humans (although they do not always do as well in areas that require specialized expertise and context, such as drafting bills).

In the congressional context, these technologies promise to help take the load off of offices struggling to keep up with the flood of communications and constituent needs, freeing up resources for legislative and oversight functions. In particular, AI tools could help with summarizing incoming information such as government documents, hearing transcripts, bills, bulk emails, and interest group communications; drafting routine communications such as op-eds, press releases, social media posts, speeches, dear colleague letters, oversight letters, casework letters, constituent letters, witness questions, and similar materials; as well as leveraging bulk legislative data for new insights. In addition to these benefits, AI poses new risks and threat vectors that Congress will need to mitigate.

Now is the time for Congress to thoughtfully study how these technologies can be applied, work with vendors and support offices to responsibly implement them, and set boundaries that acknowledge their limitations. To this end, the Subcommittee should include report language encouraging the CAO to convene a working group on the use of artificial tools in the legislative branch. Modeled on the Congressional Data Task Force, this working group

should bring together relevant internal stakeholders, as well as civil society groups and the public.

Second, the Subcommittee should elevate the House Digital Service (HDS) within the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO).[1] In January 2022, House CAO Catherine Szpindor announced the formation of the HDS. This effort—inspired by the executive branch's U.S. Digital Service, the Defense Digital Service, and the General Services Administration's 18F—is set to tackle a range of modernization challenges. Created without a specific authorization or rule, HDS is situated within an existing institution: the Office of the CAO's House Information Resources office, which manages House-wide IT operations and support. While this effort is a positive step forward, it falls short of the original vision for an independent and bicameral Congressional Digital Service proposed by Reps. Kevin McCarthy and Steny Hoyer in 2017.

To facilitate the creation of a more expansive digital service in the future, HDS should not become too entangled with CAO's internal bureaucracy and competing resource demands. In the near term, HDS should be elevated within the CAO organizational chart and reporting structure. It should also receive a direct appropriation and line item, and be allowed to receive reimbursement for services from other legislative entities, including the Members' Representational Allowance, and committee budgets. In addition, it should produce a separate annual report and congressional budget justification for FY 2025.

Third, the Subcommittee should establish a Chief Science and Technology Advisor role. In a time of escalating geopolitical risk, Congress's leadership on science and technology (S&T) policy is critical for ensuring America's future security and prosperity. In recent years,

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[1] Reynold Schweickhardt and Zach Graves, "Building Digital Capacity in Congress Recommendations for the House Digital Service," Lincoln Network (July 14, 2022), https://lincolnpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Building-Digital-Capacity-in-Congress.pdf.

this Subcommittee has advanced key reforms to help close the capacity gap. This includes the formation of GAO's Science, Technology Assessment, and Analytics (STAA) team, as well as new S&T staffing capacity at CRS. While building nonpartisan internal expertise and generating new reports is important, it is essential that committees and personal offices (the customers for S&T advice) also have sufficient absorptive capacity to leverage those resources, to take in and process information, and to navigate external expert resources.

To advance this goal, the Subcommittee should establish a nonpartisan Office of the Chief Science and Technology Advisor—created either as a House entity or a bicameral office.[2] The principal responsibility of this small office would be to act as a concierge for S&T resources—identifying and connecting with external experts (in industry, government, and academia), curating external reports and information, organizing staff briefings, and improving coordination between CRS, GAO, and congressionally-chartered entities.

Fourth, the Subcommittee should ask the CAO to create a HouseNet help desk for accessing expert policy resources. Significant support agency resources are available to congressional offices seeking policy help (including from GAO, CRS, CBO, et al.). Unfortunately, the way in which these are presented and accessed is outdated and often confusing. Instead of being designed for what best serves Members and staff in a coordinated way, these resources are often built out haphazardly.

To address this, the Subcommittee should encourage the CAO and the House Digital Service to build a HouseNet help desk portal, where staff can get assistance requesting different kinds of reports and information. Additional resources on the portal could help explain, for instance, the prioritization process of GAO's congressional protocols, the difference between

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[2] This follows a similar proposal from a 2019 congressionally-directed report by the National Academy of Public Administration.

various report methodologies and timelines (e.g., a GAO technology assessment, GAO performance audit, GAO financial audit, CRS report, CRS memo, or NASEM report), how to engage with a congressionally-chartered entity or FFRDC, as well as providing an index of forthcoming reports from different entities.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations, and for the opportunity to testify.