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COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS**

**Statement of Warren Burke, Legislative Counsel
Office of the Legislative Counsel
U.S. House of Representatives**

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Before the Subcommittee on Legislative Branch Appropriations

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the fiscal year 2026 appropriation request of \$18,400,000 for the Office of the Legislative Counsel (Office).

I am pleased and honored to appear before you today in my capacity as the Legislative Counsel of the House of Representatives. I thank you and your staff for your past support of the Office, and I look forward to working closely with you in carrying out our mission of advising and assisting the House, and its committees and Members, in the achievement of clear, faithful, and coherent expressions of legislative policies.

Meeting the Needs of the House

In direct response to requests by this Subcommittee, Leadership, and Members over recent years, the Office is taking the necessary steps to increase its capacity to meet the increasing legislative needs of the House, reduce backlogs and turnaround times, and preserve our traditional high standard of quality. Our budget reflects the funding level needed to implement these steps.

Increase in Legislation

As illustrated on page 5, requests to the Office for legislation have consistently increased over recent Congresses. The total number of bills introduced (excluding resolutions) in the House increased from 6,536 in the 114th Congress to 10,564 in the 118th Congress.

This trend continues in the 119th Congress. During the first 60 days of the 119th Congress, the number of requests for legislation received by the Office increased by 72 percent (from 3,271 requests during the corresponding period of the 118th Congress to 5,623 requests). Over the same 60 days, the number of bills (excluding resolutions) introduced in the House increased by 39 percent (from 1,259 bills during the corresponding period of the 118th Congress to 1,744 bills).

Another source of increased legislative work is amendments. While during the 118th Congress, the Office prepared 30,494 individual bills (188 percent more than the 10,564 bills that were introduced), the Office also prepared 21,484 amendments. This is a 46-percent increase from the 14,682 amendments prepared by the Office during the 114th Congress. As an example, the process for the 2025 NDAA (National Defense Authorization Act) saw the bill (comprised of 1,008 pages) favorably reported from the Armed Services Committee with a 57–1 vote followed by more than 1,387 amendments filed at the Rules Committee. Ultimately the House-passed version of the bill contained 1,484 pages after 338 amendments were agreed to.

Reducing Backlogs and Turnaround Times

The Office is committed to doing more than merely keeping up with workload. To honor the requests of this Subcommittee, Leadership and Members, the Office is taking the necessary steps to reduce backlogs and turnaround times.

There are two primary challenges to reducing backlogs and turnaround times. The first is meeting the increasing demand for legislation while preserving the Office's traditional high standard of quality. The second is a "training bottleneck", meaning that the same attorneys who are experts in drafting in a particular area of law are also responsible for training new attorneys in that area. The training bottleneck can be an especially formidable challenge when adding team members to a team that is overburdened by workload.

The Office has three approaches for addressing these challenges. First, the Office is onboarding 11 attorneys during FY2025 (instead of the more typical 4 to 6) and 6 new attorneys during FY2026 which will result in an estimated 25-percent increase in the number of attorneys as compared to the beginning of the 118th Congress. The Office is also onboarding 2 new paralegals during FY2025. The Office is addressing the training bottleneck by including 4 former Office attorneys among the 11 new attorneys onboarded during FY2025. These 4 former Office attorneys do not need to be trained, can help with workload immediately, and can serve as trainers.

A second approach is for the Office to improve its system of triaging new requests. Legislative proposals serve a variety of legitimate goals. Not all clients want full legal review. The sooner the Office can determine the desired level of review, the more efficiently the Office can process a request. To this end, the Office recently established its first-ever "formatting only" track through which clients who have proposed legislative text can request mere formatting without any legal review. In addition to expediting the process, this new formatting track allows the Office to focus its legal expertise on requests where clients do want full legal review and assist the Clerk and Government Publishing Office to more efficiently process text not otherwise prepared by the Office.

A third approach would be to establish the Office's first-ever "floater team", meaning 2 to 3 attorneys who could be reassigned weekly according to the most acute drafting needs of the House. For instance, if the Office sees that the health finance team has an increased backlog of requests for bills for introduction because the team is focused on a committee markup, the floater team could be assigned to assist in preparing those bills. The Office hopes to implement this innovative change soon, but only after filling all high-priority staffing gaps.

Supporting Teaching and Collaborative Drafting

The Office has historically performed an important institutional role by teaching staff how to understand and explain legislation so they can effectively advise Members on whether legislation accomplishes the intended goals. The need for these skills is especially high now because of staff turnover rates and the high volume of legislation.

The main way the Office teaches these skills is through the drafting process, especially collaborative drafting sessions. The Office also offers classroom-style training, such as the popular

Leg Counsel 201 interactive in-person course through the Staff Academy. The Office plans to add a Leg Counsel 301 course focusing on drafting at later stages. The Office also participates in numerous other training activities, such as new Member orientation and meeting with committee staff at the beginning of each session.

Unfortunately, excessive workload limits the capacity of the Office to engage in sufficient collaborative drafting and teaching to meet the needs of the House. As backlogs and turnaround times are reduced, the Office will have more time for collaborative drafting and teaching and can further bolster its Staff Academy and other training sessions.

Personnel

The Office’s personnel account (entitled “Draft”) comprises 93 percent of our total expenses.

Proper staffing is essential to keep up with workload, reduce backlogs and turnaround times, and preserve a high standard of quality. The Office has taken the necessary steps to increase its personnel as the following table depicts:

Staff	115th 2nd Session	116th 2nd Session	117th 2nd Session	118th 2nd Session	As of April 2, 2025	Percentage Change: 115th 2nd Session to Present
Attorneys	47	53	59	68	73	55%
Average Attorney Experience Years	15.5	12.8	12.3	11.4	12.1	-22%
Support Staff	21	25	22	22	23	9.5%
Average Support Staff Experience Years	14.9	14.5	16.6	16.6	17.5	17.4%

The table shows that even though there has been a 55% increase in the number of attorneys, the corresponding years of drafting experience and institutional knowledge have decreased. Expressed another way, for the 2nd Session of the 115th Congress, 19% of the attorneys had 30 or more years of service while 40% had less than 10 years of service. By comparison, as of April 2, 2025, 9% of the attorneys had 30 or more years of service while 56% had less than 10 years of service.

Pay and benefits are the cornerstone for compensating and caring for our staff. The Speaker’s Pay Orders have been helpful to the Office’s success in retaining staff. The cost of living in the Washington, DC metro area, especially the cost of housing and childcare, continues to

increase. These costs are a heavy burden and harm staff morale. It is important that staff pay continues to keep up with these costs and inflationary pressures.

Technology

The major nonpersonnel expenditures of our Office are associated with acquiring, maintaining, and enhancing Office technology (hardware and software) to support our mission. As much as possible, we seek to work in collaboration with the Office of the Clerk, the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer, and the Government Publishing Office to plan, test, and place into service tools that improve our processes and allow the wider House community to better interact with us and legislative text. The Office is working with the Office of the Clerk to convert the Office of the Law Revision Counsel's U.S. Code files to Comps DTD so these files can continue to be used for the Comparative Print Suite and the Office's Ramseyers after the Office of the Law Revision Counsel switches to USLM 2. Similarly, the Office is participating with others in the House and across the legislative branch to better understand artificial intelligence (AI) and its potential uses, benefits, and risks in the legislative environment. Finally, the Office recently upgraded our document management system from iManage FileSite to iManage Work 10, bringing together previously disparate client emails and drafts into a unified, complete package.

Legislative Drafting Study

Together with the Clerk of the House, the Office is participating in a Legislative Drafting Study whose aim is to facilitate collaboration between the Office and its clients during the drafting process, including through the development of a potential portal or other new software. The Office awaits the resulting plan and funding recommendations and looks forward to improving collaboration.

Conclusion

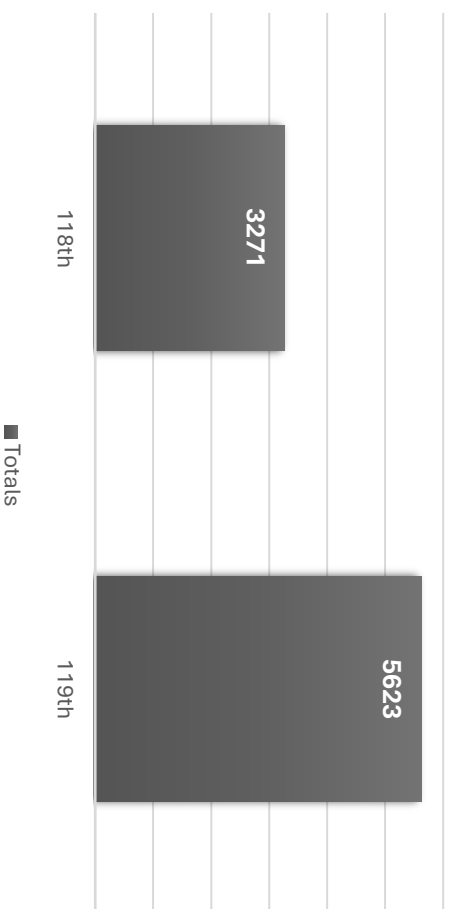
Thank you for the support this Subcommittee has given our Office. With it, we have provided efficient and expert drafting assistance to the Members and committees of the House. With continued funding, we look forward to continuing to meet the increasing legislative drafting needs of the House and improving collaboration. I am extremely proud of the Office's work to consistently meet the legislative needs of the House.

This completes my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions that any Member of the Subcommittee may have.

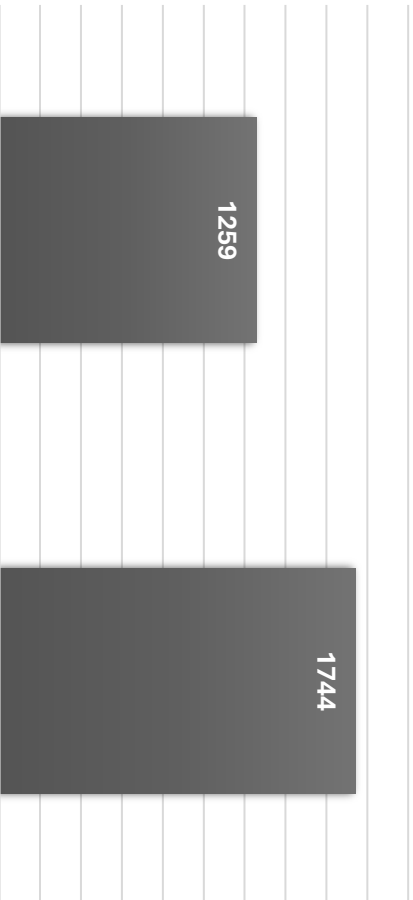
Warren Burke
Legislative Counsel

Measures of HOLC Workload

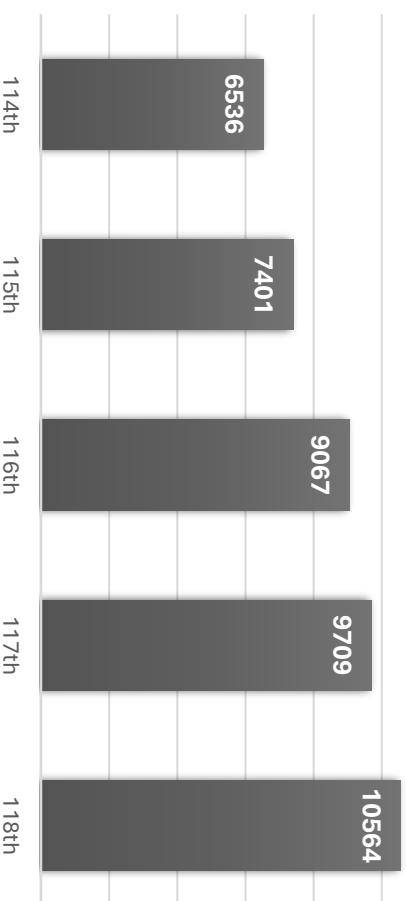
Requests Received in the First 60 Days



Bills Introduced in the First 60 Days



Total Number of Bills Introduced



HIGHLIGHTS

- During the first 60 days of the 119th Congress:
 - The number of requests received by HOLC increased by 72%.
 - The number of bills introduced in the House increased by 39%.
- In the 118th Congress, over 10,000 bills were introduced in the House for the first time since 1977 (when limits on co-sponsorship resulted in many duplicate bills).