

TESTIMONY OF OMAR AWAN



Founder, HillClimbers.org

Before the House Appropriations Committee,

Legislative Branch Subcommittee

Public Witness Testimony – FY 2026 Member Day Hearing

Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the importance of further strengthening the Clerk Hire component of the Member's Representational Allowance (MRA).

As the former Director of Strategy for the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of the U.S. House of Representatives, I was responsible for determining, analyzing, and setting MRA levels for all 441 House offices in the 118th Congress. In 2023, I conducted a comprehensive salary analysis that led to the first meaningful increase in Clerk Hire funding in over a decade, raising it from **\$994,000 to \$1,434,751 per Member Office**.

This testimony builds upon that work, utilizing the latest compensation data from HillClimbers, a salary intelligence platform I recently founded to increase transparency in legislative staff pay.

The Importance of Competitive Compensation in Congress

The effectiveness of the U.S. House of Representatives depends on its ability to **attract and retain** top legislative talent. Yet, House staff salaries



have **lagged behind** private-sector and executive branch counterparts, contributing to **high turnover rates** and a loss of institutional knowledge.

- **Turnover remains alarmingly high**, particularly among **Legislative Assistants (over 60%)** and **Legislative Correspondents/ Aides (over 70%)** in recent years—both critical policy development roles.
- **Overall turnover**, excluding interns, has hovered near **70% since LY 2021** and the average years of House or Representatives experience for a staffer in 2024 was **4.0 years** based on data since 2009.
- **Staffing levels have slightly increased**, with daily average House staffing (excluding interns) rising from 7,229 staff in LY 2022 to 7,534 in LY 2024—an **additional 150 staff per year**.
- Due to turnover, **more than 12,000 individuals cycle through these positions annually**, leading to instability and inefficiencies.

The Need to Put the Horse Before the Cart

Congress took a necessary step in 2023 by raising the Clerk Hire component from \$994,000 to \$1.434 million per Member, a 44% increase driven by my detailed salary analysis that examined:

1. **All unique job titles**: categorizing thousands of variations into standard Member office roles (e.g., "LD," "Leg Director," and "Legislative Dir" all classified as "Legislative Director").



2. **Dual-role titles:** ensuring salaries of positions like Deputy CoS/Press Secretary were accounted for in both capacities.
3. **Shared staff:** distinguishing between (a) administrative staff shared among multiple Members and (b) staff working across Member and Leadership/Committee offices, **preventing data distortion.**

However, in early 2024, despite my analysis proving the need for an increase in the Clerk Hire, MRAs were left flat. In early 2023, the overall MRA budget was set too by appropriators, so it was too late. Instead of this “cart before the horse” approach, HillClimbers proposes a better method: CHA and appropriators work together early in the year using our data and expertise to formulate accurate legislative branch budgets.

Key Findings from HillClimbers’ Analysis

Using a refined methodology with **publicly available Statements of Disbursements**, HillClimbers has re-evaluated actual Clerk Hire spending, confirming that average spending in LY 2023 aligned with the allocated amount using a similar staffing model to the 2023 salary analysis:

Year	Clerk Hire Allocation	Actual Average Spend	Difference
LY 2023	\$1,434,751	\$1,426,926	-\$7,825
LY 2024 (to 31 Dec)	\$1,434,751	\$1,474,082	+\$39,331
LY 2025 (Projected)	\$1,434,751	\$1,510,934	+\$76,183
LY 2026 (Projected)	\$1,434,751	\$1,548,707	+\$113,956

The **2024 numbers are not yet final** as year-end staff bonuses and pay for the last two days of Legislative Year 2024 will not be available until late May. Based on LY 2024 data to the end of the calendar year, projected **Clerk Hire spending in LY 2025 will likely exceed \$1.5 million per office.**

While MRA funding remained **flat in FY 2024**, actual Clerk Hire expenditures increased, meaning Members are again reallocating funds from **other MRA components** to compensate for rising salary costs.

Updated Recommendation for FY 2026

Appropriators should work with CHA and HillClimbers to base overall MRA budgets on real data early in the year. **HillClimbers projects the 2026 Clerk Hire will need to be \$1.548 million per Member Office** to:

- ✓ **Ensure market-aligned salaries**, reducing attrition to the private sector.
- ✓ **Strengthen retention**, preventing the loss of experienced staff.
- ✓ **Support legislative capacity**, to meet constituent and policy demands.

Impact of an Increased Clerk Hire Allowance

Strengthening Institutional Knowledge: High turnover erodes institutional memory, forcing Member offices to operate with **junior, less experienced staff**. Increasing the Clerk Hire allocation will allow Members to **retain mid-career professionals**, reducing reliance on short-term hires.

Reversing the "Stepping-Stone" Effect: The House has increasingly become a **training ground** for talent that moves on to **better-paying roles in the private sector** or **higher salaries in the Executive Branch**. A well-funded Clerk Hire allowance will:

- **Stabilize the workforce**, keeping skilled professionals in Congress.
- **Improve policy development**, reducing staff disruptions & departures.
- **Enhance constituent services**, ensuring every office has the resources to serve the American people effectively.

Conclusion & Recommendation

To maintain a **highly skilled, experienced, and stable workforce**, the House appropriators must change formulation processes to work with CHA when setting the overall MRA budget using Hillclimbers' robust data set. The House must **build on the progress made in FY 2023** with a **data-driven** approach that reflects **real-world salary trends**, ensuring Members have the resources to **hire, retain, and compensate their staff**—the professionals who keep Congress functioning.

I appreciate the Committee's commitment to strengthening the legislative workforce and welcome the opportunity to discuss these findings further.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Respectfully submitted,

Omar Awan - Founder, HillClimbers - HillClimbers.org

