Testimony Related to the Establishment of a House Casework Support Office, Continued Support of Institutional Modernization, and Further Exploration and Investment in Remote Voting Technology

Submitted by Danielle Stewart of POPVOX Foundation for the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch Fiscal Year 2026

Dear Chair Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Members of the House Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I am Danielle Stewart, a former House Chief of Staff and modernization staffer, now serving with the bipartisan POPVOX Foundation. Our team of bipartisan former Legislative branch staffers and public servants is dedicated to strengthening Congressional capacity and ensuring the responsible use of taxpayer funds.

I am submitting this testimony today to highlight support for the following priority items:

1. A feasibility study for establishing a House Casework Support Office.

2. Further exploration and investment in remote voting technology.

3. In-house development of AI training and resources for Members and staff.

I. Feasibility Study for a House Casework Support Office

Casework is one of Congress's most tangible constituent services. Over the past several months, offices have reported sharp increases in requests for help with federal agencies—some offices seeing double- or triple-digit spikes in new inquiries. Congressional offices are handling sudden waves of complex questions about benefits, immigration, and veterans' services as changes quickly take shape throughout the executive branch. These inquiries place a strain on limited staff resources and underscore the need for institutional support.

Our team at POPVOX Foundation operates the Casework Navigator program, which provides training, resource-sharing, and a regular newsletter to support caseworkers. We frequently learn about major agency trends from caseworkers directly—sometimes long before that information reaches leadership in Congress. We believe the House would benefit from a centralized office that could:

- Collect and disseminate up-to-date agency contacts, casework best practices, and training.

- Serve as a clearinghouse for timely updates on agency programs and policy changes.

- Provide "concierge" referrals to existing CAO business units that offer relevant services.

- Build data tools that help offices identify systemic agency issues.

A feasibility study within the CAO would be a logical next step. The House has successfully established several offices focused on staff development, such as the Coach Program, House HR Hub, and the House Intern Resource Office. A Casework Support Office is a natural extension of these efforts, providing critical institutional knowledge and collaboration to help Members serve constituents more efficiently.

II. Further Exploration and Investment in Remote Voting Technology

Voting is a core responsibility of Members, but currently, no House system exists that would allow for secure remote voting in emergencies. This issue is not about excusing absences; it is about ensuring continuity of operations when unforeseen disasters, conflicts, or future pandemics make in-person convenings impossible. Other major legislatures have successfully introduced remote or proxy voting options. For example, the Canadian House of Commons now uses a secure app that allows Members to vote remotely under extenuating circumstances. And the UK

House of Commons allows Members to appoint a proxy in limited cases, such as new parenthood or medical complications.

As threats to national security evolve, it is vital for Congress to have the ability to vote swiftly—even if Members cannot physically gather in the Capitol. Exploring the costs and feasibility of a secure remote voting system is a prudent investment to safeguard continuity and ensure the House remains a modern, resilient workplace.

III. In-House Creation of AI Professional Development

The House has shown commendable leadership in adopting policies that encourage responsible AI use. Many legislatures are moving quickly to integrate AI into daily operations, and the House is already piloting new AI tools and refining institutional guidance.

To keep pace with this rapid technological change, staff and Members would benefit from in-house training. An in-house AI training curriculum, ideally managed by the CAO's Congressional Staff Academy, could:

- Provide optional courses on best practices for secure and ethical AI usage.

- Ensure all offices—especially smaller ones—can access practical guidance on these emerging tools.

- Offer "sandbox" sessions so staff can experiment safely with AI platforms, learning how to incorporate them into daily workflows.

In the last few years, Congress has taken proactive steps to "meet the moment" seen by the growth in AI in nearly every sector worldwide. As these developments occur, our team has produced reports on the adoption of AI in legislatures around the world. With the average age of Congressional staff hovering around 31 years old, the House is host to many early adopters of

this new technology. Internal scans of House network traffic suggest that up to a quarter of the chamber's staff are already using some form of generative AI regularly. And as seen in the recent spike in users worldwide of the Chinese-owned DeepSeek AI platform, the development of secure AI usage and robust policy within the halls of government is at a critical juncture.

As chiefs of staff, staff directors, and office managers face the necessary task of helping their staff navigate the smart adoption of these new tools, the development of optional House-approved training on AI usage would empower Members, staff, and interns with access to up-to-date guidance and knowledge on these platforms, paving the way for continued innovation in the Legislative branch and more modern representation for the American people.

Conclusion

The House has made important strides in modernization and staff support in recent years. A feasibility study for a House Casework Support Office would help address the increasing demands on staff and enhance oversight of federal agencies. Continued research into secure remote voting technology would ensure continuity of operations during national emergencies. Finally, investing in AI training will keep Congress competitive and responsive to the challenges of a rapidly evolving society.

Thank you for considering these recommendations. POPVOX Foundation stands ready to provide any further information or support.

Respectfully submitted,

Danielle Stewart

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