

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Legislative Branch

Written Testimony of Dr. David Andrew Weinberg (Policy Strategist at Protect Democracy)

“FY 2026 Public Witness” for April 9, 2025

Dear Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espallat, and distinguished members of the House Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on strengthening efforts by legislative agencies to protect Members of Congress, their staff, and their families. You and your colleagues do essential work for the American people, and you should never have to fear that this public service could endanger you, your employees, or your loved ones. Unfortunately, threats of this sort are at perilously high levels, including in ways that could be degrading the legislative branch’s effectiveness. For this reason, relevant security programs by the U.S. Capitol Police Department, the Architect of the Capitol, and the Sergeants at Arms should be robustly funded. At the same time, helping these efforts succeed requires greater transparency to lawmakers and the general public from the agencies that administer these them.

The levels of threats faced by Members of Congress and their staff have increased considerably in just the last decade. In 2016, the U.S. Capitol Police recorded an estimated 902 threatening communications directed at Members of Congress.¹ However, the number of concerning statements and direct threats against Members of Congress in 2024 was more than ten times that level and has remained close to this higher range for every year starting in 2020.² Unfortunately, the initial data from 2025 is not looking encouraging, either. On the contrary, the subset of these communications that are considered most severe reportedly spiked to much higher

¹ Letter from House Sergeant at Arms Paul Irving to Federal Election Commission Chairman Steven T. Walther, June 21, 2017, <https://www.fec.gov/files/legal/aos/83377.pdf>

² U.S. Capitol Police, “USCP Threat Assessment Cases for 2024,” Feb. 3, 2025, <https://www.uscp.gov/media-center/press-releases/uscp-threat-assessment-cases-2024>

levels in January and February of 2025 compared to those same months in 2024.³

This acute threat environment has harmful consequences for many of the public servants who staff the legislative branch. A survey of senior Congressional staff published last year found alarmingly high rates of respondents who said that they experience “anxiety and/or fear about accompanying the Member to public events” (40%), “anxiety about the safety of my colleagues” (63%), and/or “anxiety for the safety of my Member” (74%).⁴ Levels in all three of these categories were even higher among Democratic respondents. Additionally, more than a quarter of respondents – with similar levels from both parties – reported that they “frequently” or “very frequently” have been questioning whether to keep working for Congress due to safety concerns.⁵

The personal toll of this environment can be heavy for those who work here in other ways as well. For instance, “when it comes to safety and security, I have to think constantly and frequently much more than ever before,” said a chief of staff to then-Rep. Dan Kildee (D, MI).⁶ “It traumatized my kids,” said former Rep. Tom Reed (R, NY).⁷ “I just don’t feel safe anymore,” said Rep. Norma Torres (D, CA), who reportedly moved homes after an incident at her residence.⁸

Particularly worrisome for our democracy is the extent to which these threats may constrain the ability of some lawmakers to vote their conscience without fear of physical harm, either to themselves or to those they care about. It has allegedly been a factor in some of the absolute most

³ Pema Levy, “Violent Threats against Members of Congress Spiked as Senate Considered Trump’s Nominees: Exclusive Capitol Police Data Shows that Threats Doubled this January and February,” *Mother Jones*, Mar. 25, 2025, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2025/03/violent-threats-congress-donald-trump-data/>

⁴ Kathy Goldschmidt, *State of the Congress 2024: An Assessment of the Civility, Functionality, and Capacity of the 118th Congress by Senior Congressional Staff*, Congressional Management Foundation (Mar. 27, 2024), p. 25, https://www.congressfoundation.org/storage/documents/CMF_Pubs/cmf_state_of_the_congress_2024.pdf

⁵ *Id.*, p. 27.

⁶ Scott MacFarlane, “How Top Congressional Aides are Addressing Increased Fears They Have for Safety of Lawmakers and their Staff,” *CBS News*, May 20, 2024, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/congressional-aides-increased-fear-for-safety-of-lawmakers-staff/>

⁷ Sarah D. Wire, “Threats against Members of Congress Are Skyrocketing. It’s Changing the Job,” *Los Angeles Times*, Sep. 20, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2021-09-20/threats-members-of-congress>

⁸ *Id.*

important decisions for some Members, including with regard to the confirmation of cabinet nominees,⁹ the impeachment¹⁰ or indictment¹¹ of a president, the counting of states' electoral votes,¹² the extent of Members' constituent engagement,¹³ or their retirement from office.¹⁴

Several of the legislative support agencies this subcommittee oversees administer crucial programs that help mitigate some of these security threats. This includes many different functions of the U.S. Capitol Police, such as increased hiring, procurement, and planning in order to better protect the Capitol complex;¹⁵ increased protective details and escorts at DC area airports;¹⁶ expanded intelligence capabilities to monitor for threats;¹⁷ and regional field offices to investigate

⁹ Levy, 'Violent Threats'.

¹⁰ Zack Beauchamp, "The Capitol Hill Mob Wanted to Intimidate Congress. It's Working.: After Receiving Death Threats, Republicans Say They're Afraid to Vote to Impeach," *Vox*, Jan. 13, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/2021/1/13/22229052/capitol-hill-riot-intimidate-legislators>; Colby Hall, "Liz Cheney: GOP Members of Congress Told Her They Voted NOT to Impeach Trump Due to Personal Security Concerns," *Mediaite*, Jun 7, 2021, <https://www.mediaite.com/tv/liz-cheney-gop-members-of-congress-told-her-they-voted-not-to-impeach-trump-due-to-personal-security-concerns/>

¹¹ McKay Coppins, "What Mitt Romney Saw in the Senate," *The Atlantic*, Sep. 13, 2023,

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2023/11/mitt-romney-retiring-senate-trump-mcconnell/675306/>

¹² Zachary Evans, "GOP Rep. Claims Colleagues Objected to Election Results for Fear Their Families Would Be Harmed," *National Review*, Jan. 12, 2021, <https://www.nationalreview.com/news/gop-rep-claims-colleagues-objected-to-election-results-for-fear-their-families-would-be-harmed/>; Aaron Blake, "The role of violent threats in Trump's GOP reign, according to Republicans," *Washington Post*, Dec. 11, 2021,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/12/11/republicans-repeatedly-point-violent-threats-key-trumps-gop-rein/>

¹³ Danny Hakim, Ken Bensinger, and Eileen Sullivan, "'We'll See You at Your House': How Fear and Menace Are Transforming Politics," *New York Times*, May 19, 2024, updated May 20, 2024,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/19/us/politics/political-violence.html>; Candice Norwood and Mariel Padilla, "'I Don't Feel Safe'," *The 19th*, Jan. 5, 2022, <https://19thnews.org/2022/01/january-6-congress-women-safety/>; Jobin Panicker, "North Texas congressman postpones town hall, cites threats of violence after heated D.C. exchange,"

WFAA News, Mar. 14, 2025, <https://www.wfaa.com/article/news/local/texas-congressman-postpones-town-hall-reports-threats-of-violence-following-heated-exchange-in-dc/287-f94f4a22-c522-4145-a7a9-8302686d777b>;

Andrew Graham and Joshua Wolfson, "Hageman cancels in-person town halls, opts for virtual events citing safety concerns," *Wyofile*, Mar. 25, 2025, <https://wyofile.com/hageman-cancels-in-person-town-halls-opts-for-virtual-events-citing-safety-concerns/>

¹⁴ Jonathan Martin, "Ohio House Republican, Calling Trump 'a Cancer,' Bows Out of 2022," *New York Times*, Sep. 16, 2021, updated Nov. 2, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/16/us/politics/anthony-gonzalez-ohio-trump.html>

¹⁵ Testimony of U.S. Capitol Police Chief J. Thomas Manger to the House Committee on Appropriations, Mar. 25, 2025, p. 5, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AP/AP24/20250325/118041/HHRG-119-AP24-20250325-SD002.pdf>

¹⁶ Testimony of U.S. Capitol Police Chief J. Thomas Manger to the Committee on House Administration, Mar. 21, 2024, p. 5, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/HA/HA00/20240321/117006/HHRG-118-HA00-Wstate-MangerT-20240321.pdf>

¹⁷ *Id.*

those threats.¹⁸ It also includes discrete programs by the Architect of the Capitol or the Sergeants at Arms, such as hardening facilities at both the Capitol complex as well as district offices, giving security trainings in both places, and reimbursing some of Members' costs for home security.¹⁹

Officials have sought - and received - permission several times from the Federal Elections Commission for lawmakers to use campaign funds for a broadening range of security expenditures over the years.²⁰ The use of campaign funds for these purposes has therefore skyrocketed in the last decade.²¹ But the need for these services still far outstrips Members' ability to procure them.

First, Congress should further increase its spending to protect Members and their staff. For example, Members outside of leadership typically do not receive full-time protective services; they can request it but need may still exceed availability.²² Members may be unable to cover these expenses themselves, which was part of why the FEC recently authorized the wider use of campaign funds for security expenses, with the chair raising concern that less affluent individuals "are put in the position of making a choice of risking their safety, or their families' safeties, in order to try to run for federal office."²³ But the updated guidelines still cover only certain security costs; even tapping into campaign budgets may be inadequate to meet some lawmakers' needs.

¹⁸ Katherine Tully-McManus, "Inside how the Capitol Police has changed since Jan. 6, 2021," *Politico*, Dec. 25, 2024, <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/12/25/capitol-police-change-since-jan-6-00195947>

¹⁹ Testimony of House Sergeant at Arms William McFarland to House Appropriations Subcommittee on Legislative Branch, Apr. 17, 2024, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AP/AP24/20240417/117121/HHRG-118-AP24-Wstate-McFarlandW-20240417.pdf>; Tarinelli and Papp, "Staffers Bear the Brunt of Threats Aimed at District Offices," *Roll Call*, May 29, 2024, <https://rollcall.com/2024/05/29/staffers-bear-brunt-threats-congress-district-offices/>

²⁰ Derek B. Johnson, "FEC Expands Campaign Spending Rules to Allow for Physical, Cybersecurity Purchases," *CyberScoop*, Sep. 24, 2024, <https://cyberscoop.com/fec-campaign-funds-security-purchases/>

²¹ Russ Choma and Sinduja Rangarajan, "Members of Congress are Spending More than Ever on Security," *Mother Jones*, June 29, 2021, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2021/06/members-of-congress-are-spending-more-than-ever-on-security/>; Greg Morton, Marianna Sotomayor, and Camila DeChalus, "Lawmakers are Spending Way More to Keep Themselves Safe" *Washington Post*, Sep. 18, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/09/18/congress-security-spending-violence-threats/>

²² Darreonna Davis, "Why threats against members of Congress are driving more security spending," *The 19th*, Feb. 6, 2024, <https://19thnews.org/2024/02/threats-congress-women-security-spending/>; Choma and Rangarajan, "Spending More"; & McKay Coppins, "What Mitt Romney Saw in the Senate," *The Atlantic*, Sep. 13, 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2023/11/mitt-romney-retiring-senate-trump-mcconnell/675306/>

²³ Zach Montellaro, "Threats against Politicians are Prevalent. The FEC Wants to Let Campaigns Pay for Security." *Politico*, Mar. 27, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/03/27/fec-regulation-security-costs-00149218>

Second, lawmakers deserve to have confidence that their safety will remain a priority regardless of their party or their position within it. That safeguards are in place at all levels to ensure decisions about threat investigations, security details, and other supports would never be allocated in an unfair or retaliatory manner, as recently occurred with security details revoked by the executive branch.²⁴ National security depends on public servants being secure to do their jobs.

Third, appropriators should require greater transparency about the nature of the threats to lawmakers and the programs to address them. This is not just a fair tradeoff for added funds, it also is essential for ensuring that funds get allocated effectively. For instance, USCP should be required to disclose for each year from 2017 onward not just the number of concerning statements and direct threats against Members, families, and staff, but also: the number of these that the USCP determined were credible threats; the number of investigations of these opened by the USCP; the number of investigations that resulted in criminal referral; the number of resulting prosecutions; and the number of convictions (subdivided between convictions in court versus plea agreements).

Last but by no means least, the security officers who provide lawmakers with these services deserve to be better paid, better supported, and better recognized for their sacrifices. The absolute minimum in this regard should include implementing the overdue requirement mandated by law to display a Congressional plaque (which reportedly has already been prepared) listing the names of all the police officers who heroically saved lawmakers' lives on January 6, 2021.²⁵ They do so much for our nation's legislature; this is the very least that we should be doing for them.

²⁴ "Fauci, Bolton, Pompeo: Full List of People Who Donald Trump Revoked Security Details For," *Newsweek*, Jan. 24, 2025, <https://www.newsweek.com/full-list-people-donald-trump-revoked-security-details-2020601>; Leo Shane, "Hegseth Strips Milley of Security Detail, Orders Investigation," *Military Times*, Jan. 29, 2025, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2025/01/29/hegseth-strips-milley-of-security-detail-orders-treason-investigation/>; Jaroslav Lukiv and Kayla Epstein, "Trump revokes security clearance for Harris, Clinton, and critics," *BBC News*, Mar. 22, 2025; <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c74kg3e2m08o>

²⁵ Letter from Rep. Jason Crow et al. to Speaker Mike Johnson, Jan. 16, 2025, <https://crow.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/crow.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/Crow%20January%206%20Plaque%20FINAL.pdf>