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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 2027 appropriation request of $19,202,000 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.

Office Budget Request

For fiscal year 2027, I am requesting $19,202,000, a 2.5-percent increase from our fiscal year 2026 enacted budget. Our personnel account (entitled "Draft") is approximately 93 percent of our total budget. The remaining 7 percent is for administrative expenses including expenditures associated with acquiring, maintaining, and enhancing technology.

Our requested budget reflects HOLC's continued commitment to meeting the increasing legislative needs of the House and preserving our traditional high standard of quality through a multifaceted approach involving sufficient personnel, enhanced efficiency and flexibility in workflow, and technological innovation and adoption.

Personnel

Proper staffing is essential to keep up with an increasing workload while simultaneously reducing backlogs and turnaround times and preserving a high standard of quality.

In my fiscal year 2026 testimony, I emphasized the dramatic increase in my Office's workload over the previous decade. For example, the total number of bills introduced in the House increased from 6,536 in the 114th Congress to 10,564 in the 118th Congress. The actual number of bills prepared by my Office during the 118th Congress was 30,494 (188 percent more than the 10,564 that were introduced). The total number of amendments has also increased. My Office prepared 21,484 amendments during the 118th Congress, a 46-percent increase from the 14,682 amendments prepared during the 114th Congress. These workload levels have continued to increase in the 119th Congress, although less dramatically than in the previous Congresses. During the first 13 months of the 119th Congress, my Office received 23,239 requests, which is a 5.7 percent increase compared to the 21,979 requests prepared during the first 13 months of the 118th Congress.

Thanks to the support of this Subcommittee, my Office continues its progress in recruiting and retaining sufficient personnel to keep up with workload, reduce backlogs and turnaround times, and preserve a high standard of quality. As discussed in my testimony last year, this requires an across-the-board effort by my Office's entire staff because of the "training bottleneck" associated with increased hiring: 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 is especially challenging when adding members to a team that is overburdened by workload. I am deeply grateful to the Office's attorneys, paralegals, and other staff who, in addition to their drafting responsibilities, spend substantial time recruiting and training. Legislative drafters take years, not months, to be fully trained and maximize productivity, so the benefits of my Office's commitment to recruiting and retaining new staff will increase for years to come.

The following table depicts my Office's efforts to increase personnel to keep up with workload while preserving high levels of quality:

Staff	116th 1st Session	117th 1st Session	118th 1st Session	119th 1st Session	Percentage Change: 116th 1st Session to 119th 1st Session
Attorneys	49	57	61	78	59%
Average Attorney Experience Years	14.1	11.8	12.7	11	-22%
Support Staff	23	23	19	23	0%
Average Support Staff Experience Years	13.4	15.5	17.3	15.8	18%

The table shows that even though there has been a 59% increase in the number of attorneys, the corresponding years of drafting experience and institutional knowledge have decreased. Expressed another way, for the 1st Session of the 116th Congress, 16% of the attorneys had 30 or more years of service while 41% had less than 10 years of service. By comparison, at the end of the 1st Session of the 119th Congress, 9% of the attorneys had 30 or more years of service while 58% had less than 10 years of service.

Pay and benefits are the cornerstone for compensating and retaining 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.

Enhanced Efficiency and Flexibility in Workflow

In addition to staffing at appropriate levels, the Office is also tackling the problem of increasing workload through innovative measures to improve efficiency and flexibility in handling requests. One way the Office has done this is by expediting a determination of the client's desired level of review. 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, over the past year the Office has experimented with a "formatting only" pilot program 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 resources providing legal expertise on requests where clients do want full legal review and assists the Clerk and Government Publishing Office to more efficiently process text not otherwise prepared by the Office. With more than 200 bills and resolutions having gone through the pilot program, it has proved to be a success and is moving out of the pilot stage.

Another innovative approach was to establish the Office's first-ever "floater team", meaning attorneys who can be reassigned weekly according to the most acute drafting needs of the House. When I testified last year, the "floater team" was merely proposed. Now, it is reality. The team consists of four members, each of whom split their time between their regular areas of drafting expertise and their service to other attorneys in need. Recently, the team rebranded itself the "Tiger Team", an indication of the team's *esprit de corps*. Still in its infancy, the team has already reduced backlogs in multiple drafting areas.

Collaborative Drafting

The Office has historically performed an important institutional role by not only drafting legislation but also helping staff to understand the text and the drafting process well enough to advise Members on whether legislation is well-drafted and accomplishes the intended policy goals. This role is especially important now because of high staff turnover rates and the high volume of legislation.

The main way attorneys perform this role is by working directly with staff on drafting, especially during 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 also participates in numerous other training activities, such as meeting with Members and staff during orientation meetings and other training and information sessions.

Technology

The Office's major nonpersonnel expenditures 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. For instance, last year the Office 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. This enables us to better track, identify, and consolidate requests and respond more quickly to questions from staff. We have since expanded the use of this technology, in concert with the Office's new Tiger Team discussed above, to identify the drafting teams most in need and provide support to those teams as appropriate.

The Office is also collaborating with other offices across the legislative branch to better understand artificial intelligence (AI) and its potential uses, benefits, and risks in the legislative environment. The Office has organized a group of staff to evaluate how the Office may use Microsoft Copilot as authorized by the House to improve efficiencies, such as by improving legal research. In addition to experimenting with the Office's own use of AI, the Office is responding to the use of AI by our clients. In the near term, we are bracing for AI to expand our workload. Text produced by outside entities, whether a human or a computer, often takes significantly longer to review and revise as necessary to ensure the text accomplishes the sponsor's intended policy goals.

Legislative Drafting Study

Together with the Clerk of the House, the Office participated in a Legislative Drafting Study whose aim was 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 Study is now complete. The Office looks forward to working with other offices of the House and our clients to implement the Study's recommendations.
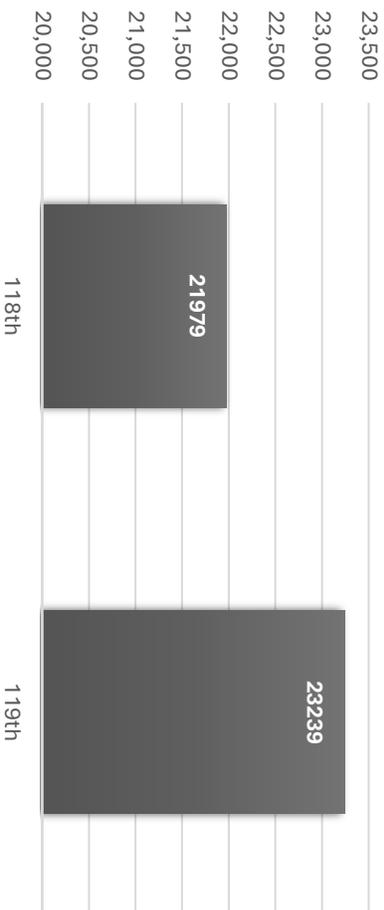
Conclusion

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 and its continued commitment to 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.
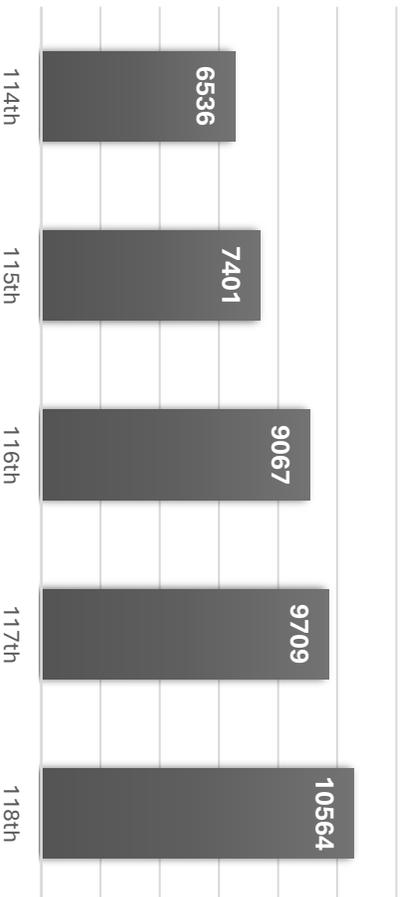
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Legislative Counsel
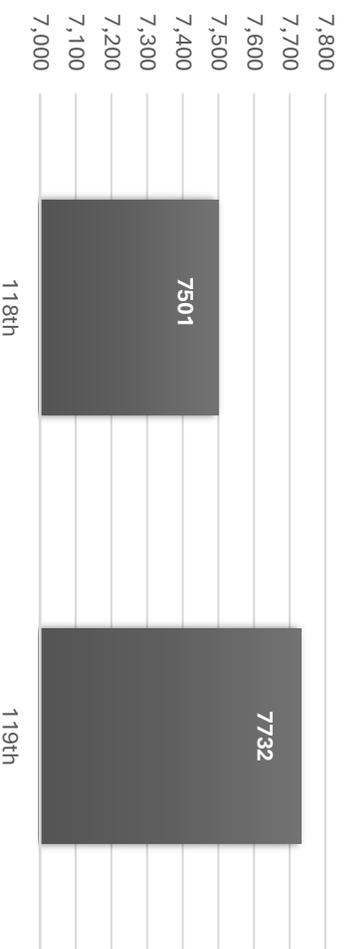
Measures of HOLC Workload

HOLC
HOUSE OFFICE OF THE
LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL
EST. 1916

Number of Requests Received During the First 13 Months of the Congress

Congress	Value
118th	21979
119th	23239

Number of House Bills Introduced During the First 13 Months of the Congress

Congress	Value
118th	7501
119th	7732

Total Number of House Bills Introduced (by Congress)

Congress	Value
114th	6536
115th	7401
116th	9067
117th	9709
118th	10564

HIGHLIGHTS

➢ During the first 13 months of the 119th Congress:

　○ The number of requests received by HOLC increased by 5.73%.

　○ The number of House bills introduced increased by 3.08%.

➢ The 118th Congress saw a 61.63% increase of bills introduced compared to the 114th Congress.