

Testimony of Rep. Derek Kilmer (WA) – March 28, 2019, Member Hearing

- Mr. Chair, I want to thank you and the Ranking Member for holding this Member Day.
- When I was first elected to the House of Representatives, I joked with folks back home that it was going to be a fixer-upper.
- When renovating a house, you don't just diagnose the problems like water in the basement or an outlet that doesn't work. You have to fix the structural flaws causing those problems, like the plumbing and electrical system.
- As the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, I am excited to work with you all to identify these structural flaws and to begin to develop some commonsense, bipartisan solutions that will help get Congress back to work.
- As folks in this room know, some of our biggest challenges relate to the budget and appropriations process.
- In the wake of the recent 35-day shutdown, the longest in our government's history, it's clear we need to do better.
- While I am eager for the Select Committee to get to work on developing recommendations for bipartisan solutions to address this problem, having served this past year on the Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform, I recognize that this is a job that is easier said than done.
- Knowing that, I believe its important that our hard-working federal employees not be held hostage in the event of a future government shutdown.
- If partisan posturing leads to a government shutdown, I want to make sure civil servants are not left holding the bag.
- That is why I introduced H.R. 588 – the Federal Employee Civil Relief Act.
- The bill addresses the real threats federal workers face when they miss a paycheck because we failed to pass our spending bills on time – consequences like losing their homes, falling behind on student loans and other bills, having their car repossessed, or losing their health insurance because they have been furloughed during a shutdown or required to work without pay.
- Modeled after the Servicemembers Relief Act – which has been the law of the land since the 1940s – this legislation would safeguard workers impacted by a shutdown from the following:
 - Being evicted or foreclosed;

- Having their car or other property repossessed;
 - Falling behind in student loan payments;
 - Falling behind in paying bills; or
 - Losing their insurance because of missed premiums.
- The protection would last during and 30 days following a shutdown to give workers a chance to catch up on their bills once their paychecks are restored.
- The last partial government shutdown hurt more than 800,000 federal workers in all 50 states.
- Across 800,000 kitchen tables, hardworking people were forced to figure out how to pay bills and provide for their families without an income.
- And this partial shutdown only impacted about a quarter of the federal government – so we know the consequences could have been much worse.
- Federal workers are public servants – they shouldn't be held hostage or harmed by Congressional inaction.
- Let me be clear, government shutdowns are wrong, and we have to fix the structural flaws in the congressional budget process.
- But I also believe we have to have a safety net for our federal workers to ensure that they're not held responsible if we fail.
- It's Congress's responsibility to consider a back-up plan that would help families most affected should a shutdown occur despite our best efforts to prevent them.
- This bill is that back-up plan and would give federal workers insurance they deserve against financial hardship should Congress fail to do its job and fund the government.
- Chairman Cummings and Ranking Member Jordan – thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about this bill.
- I urge you to consider taking up this important legislation and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.