



Statement of Thomas Austin, Architect

Committee on House Administration Hearing |

Architect of the Capitol

June 25, 2025

Chairman Steil, Ranking Member Morelle and distinguished Members of this committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Architect of the Capitol (AOC). We are committed to working closely with you and your staff to ensure the AOC meets the needs and expectations of the U.S. House of Representatives in service to Congress and the American people.

It is an honor to serve as the 13th Architect of the Capitol and as a steward of the historic and vital buildings that make up the Capitol campus, ensuring their preservation, functionality and safety for Members of Congress, staff and visitors. As you know, I began my tenure in June of 2024 and am privileged, day in and day out, to be entrusted to lead this remarkable agency.

I speak on behalf of the entire AOC leadership team when I say we are enormously grateful for the 2,500 hardworking, devoted AOC employees who tirelessly carry out their duties in support of Congress, the Supreme Court, the Library of Congress and the many other AOC-managed facilities.

One of my top priorities is close communication with AOC staff, which I believe is essential to building and maintaining faith and confidence in our agency's leadership. Whether discussing the particulars of daily operations or our broader visions for the future of the campus, I am equally committed to practicing clear and timely communication that ensures accountability and coordination with this committee, Congress and internal AOC entities.

In keeping with the trust inherent in this role, I am dedicated to leading with transparency and integrity as we meet our mission to serve Congress and the Supreme Court, preserve America's Capitol and inspire memorable experiences.

I. Overview

The AOC plays a vital role in supporting the operations of Congress, the Supreme Court and the Library of Congress. Our staff works around the clock to preserve and maintain over 18.5 million square feet of facilities, 570 acres of grounds and thousands of works of art. This 24-hour, seven-day-per-week operation works in concert to preserve our historic assets and improve aging infrastructure. Beyond these preservation and maintenance priorities, our team is also responsible for hosting many key events and seasonal traditions that bring together thousands of visitors each year. From preparations for the annual Capitol Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony to a multi-month effort in constructing the Presidential Inauguration platform, the AOC continually delivers with professionalism and expertise.

II. Prioritizing Physical Security & Life Safety

Ensuring physical security and life safety is paramount. Thanks to your support, the AOC has

made significant strides in enhancing security measures across the campus. Collaboration with internal and external partners has strengthened emergency planning and bolstered security for events at the Capitol campus. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget request aligns with our coordinated approach to address security projects consisting of significant construction or system replacements to support the United States Capitol Police and House and Senate Sergeants at Arms' missions.

The agency also remains committed to staff safety, dedicating time and attention to training, processes, procedures and operations. These efforts protect not only our staff but ensure a safe working environment for Members of Congress, their staff, and the public.

III. Workforce Investments & Meeting Mission Requirements

Under my leadership, the Architect of the Capitol has been restructuring to clarify the responsibilities of each office and avoid unnecessary redundancies. We have centralized two AOC contracting offices that were operating under separate AOC jurisdictions into the Acquisitions and Material Management Division. With this change, we have streamlined operations and improved efficiency both internally and with our external project collaborators.

A robust workforce is necessary for the Architect of the Capitol to consistently meet the needs of the 435 Members of the House of Representatives. Our Human Capital Strategy revolves around three pillars: talent acquisition, talent development, and engagement and retention of employees. We are updating our wage grades for our skilled labor employees in order to appropriately compensate and retain a skilled workforce to meet the needs of Congress. We have established an apprenticeship program to build and maintain a pool of experienced tradespeople to support our specialty workforce, and we participate in dozens of career fairs and events annually to promote the unique opportunities for employment with the Architect of the Capitol. Our Human Capital Management Division is continuously working to support our staff so that the AOC can ensure it retains a skilled workforce capable of maintaining and modernizing the campus.

IV. Modern Management of Aging Infrastructure

The AOC is dedicated to a holistic, long-term strategy for facilities management that emphasizes the maintenance and preservation of the Capitol campus while also modernizing these spaces. The aging infrastructure and facilities of the campus present ongoing challenges that are further compounded by inflationary increases, uninterrupted operations and unforeseen emergency repairs. In the 119th Congress, the AOC is focusing on critical priorities such as upgrading hearing rooms, addressing aging elevators, replacing mechanical systems, and making necessary renovations of fire alarms and sprinkler systems. Along with these infrastructure projects, our House Office Buildings jurisdiction receives as many as 14,000 work order requests each month which must be addressed in short order.

Additionally, the AOC is developing an Enterprise Asset Management system to create an enhanced, organized method for managing, coordinating and overseeing asset-related activities throughout their respective lifecycles. A well-developed asset management system will offer

more detailed insights to enhance data-driven financial decisions and project prioritization while also addressing backlog and deferred maintenance issues.

V. Conclusion

On behalf of the dedicated employees at the AOC, I extend our gratitude to this committee for your ongoing support. Your dedication and partnership in service to the American people are integral to our daily operations and mission accomplishment. Chairman Steil, Ranking Member Morelle and Members of the committee, thank you for your time and your continued support of the AOC.