

**Statement of Mary B. Mazanec
Director, Congressional Research Service
Before the
Committee on House Administration
Modernization Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
April 26, 2023**

Chairwoman Bice, Ranking Member Kilmer, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing regarding Congressional Research Service (CRS) modernization efforts. I look forward to discussing how we can best support the evolving needs of Congress and sharing details about our ongoing activities to enhance CRS operations. We are deeply committed to fulfilling our mission to serve Congress and strive to be the premier source of research and analysis for Congress. We work with nearly every Member and committee, assisting with the full range of Congress's legislative, oversight, and representational duties.

In today's testimony, I will highlight CRS's progress with respect to several initiatives the Service has undertaken to optimize resource utilization and enhance product and service offerings. In addition, I will offer the Service's thinking regarding current and future priorities and outline some of the challenges CRS faces to ensure that it continues to provide exceptional research, analysis, and information to a modern Congress.

SERVICE TO CONGRESS

In fulfilling its statutory mandate, CRS is committed to serving Congress with "the highest quality of research, analysis, information and confidential consultation, to support the exercise of its legislative, representational and oversight duties in its role as a co-equal branch of government." To this end, during fiscal year 2022, CRS experts responded to over 73,000 congressional requests; prepared nearly 1,100 new products and updated over 1,900 existing products. Additionally, CRS information specialists completed over 200 Geographical Information System (GIS) projects, incorporating visualized geographical data in a variety of CRS products.

The Service offered 264 seminars and programs, which were attended by approximately 10,000 congressional participants. Sessions covered topics such as tribal issues, national spectrum policy, tax credits for families, and the U.S. economic recovery. We also offered a series of introductory and advanced Defense Institutes, Legislative and Budget Process Institutes, and the Federal Law Update (FLU), which experienced a record number of registrations during the year. At Congress' request, CRS designed and launched the Congressional Legal Education Forum to present and discuss key legal principles with non-attorney congressional staff. CRS also produced 86 videos and podcasts featuring CRS analysts and legislative attorneys discussing a myriad of topics including defense and intelligence, homeland security and emergency management, science and technology, and healthcare.

CRS takes great pride in the breadth and depth of expertise that it provides Congress at every stage of the legislative process. In fiscal year 2022, CRS experts provided extensive support to Members and congressional staff on a wide range of legal and policy questions associated with issues including antitrust, border security, climate change, cybersecurity, tax policy, immigration, the law of war, and the conflict in Ukraine. The Service worked closely with Congress in its consideration of issues and programs, proposed as part of the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, and the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023. CRS experts supported lawmakers and congressional staff as they considered the Continuing Appropriations and Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act, reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, as well as enactment of the Postal Service Reform Act of 2022, and the America COMPETES Act of 2022. In addition, CRS staff continued to provide guidance on the legislative process, congressional oversight, and the annual appropriations bills.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

CRS routinely engages in an agency-wide strategic planning process to ensure that its product and service offerings and operational capabilities continue to meet the needs of Congress. The current strategic plan (the CRS Directional Plan 2019-2023) identifies two strategic goals: enhancing service and access for all of Congress and optimizing resource utilization. The plan complements the Library's 2019-2023 Strategic Plan and executes the goals and objectives therein with respect to Congress.

Critical to CRS's strategic planning is the feedback received from congressional stakeholders. Through its programs and seminars, direct interaction with congressional staff – including through over 70,000 congressional requests each year, and in my own conversations with Members and staff, the Service invites and regularly receives feedback from congressional users, both formal and informal. For example, CRS collects and analyzes data to gain insight on congressional usage of its products and services. Input from congressional users also informed the redesign of crs.gov.

In fiscal year 2020, CRS contracted with Gallup, Inc., to conduct a survey of congressional staff designed to gauge the value and utility of various research products and consultative services offered by the Service, as well as to gather information about how such products and services are used by Congress. Of course, CRS also responds to congressional directives and recommendations. For example, the Service successfully implemented the public release of its non-confidential products in response to Congress's direction in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018.

In 2022, CRS initiated a new cycle of strategic planning for the period 2023-2027. I established a variety of working groups to examine and advise me with respect to virtually every area of CRS operations including workforce development; product development; congressional outreach; diversity and inclusion; IT requirements; the use of data associated with the work of CRS; and the internal processes used to deliver support to Congress, with a particular focus on the timeliness of such delivery. In addition, a Futures Subcommittee was established to explore and make recommendations regarding CRS services and operations beyond the next five year planning cycle. The feedback received from these groups will inform decision-making regarding CRS's future direction.

ENHANCING SERVICES AND STRENGTHENING CAPACITY TO MEET THE NEEDS OF A MODERN CONGRESS

CRS is fully engaged in accomplishing the goals and objectives identified in its current directional plan and has undertaken a number of initiatives to ensure that it continues to be relevant and useful to Congress. The status of each of the initiatives is closely monitored and

reported on a quarterly basis. All are progressing on-time in meeting established benchmarks. The following summarizes CRS's progress as a result of its planning efforts.

Products and Services

CRS seeks to present its research and analysis in formats that are most useful to Congress. The Service established a Products Advisory Working Group to thoroughly vet new product types and provide strategic guidance in the identification, development, and maintenance of CRS product guidelines.

In response to congressional demand, CRS increased its publication of short-form written products, including *In Focus*, *Insights* and *Legal Sidebar* products, as well as infographics, and short reports. In addition, the Service added one-page, stand-alone summaries to compliment longer reports, providing a quick and easy to read overview of the information and analysis featured in CRS reports. These products enable Members and staff to provide a "rapid response" to questions about important issues and developments.

CRS also expanded its multimedia offerings. The Service produced a growing collection of video recordings and podcasts featuring past CRS programs and seminars, as well as original CRS expert presentations of policy issues. CRS's multimedia product line currently includes over 500 such presentations. Additionally, CRS is in the process of acquiring software that will enable congressional users to subscribe to its podcasts using popular audio streaming platforms.

CRS continues to develop the necessary capabilities to produce interactive and visually-based products. During the past fiscal year, CRS's efforts were primarily focused on testing and refining the processes and technological tools required to produce interactive graphics.

Congress.gov Enhancements

Congress.gov is the authoritative source for legislative data. Last year alone, it received over 102 million page views from more than twenty-seven million unique visitors. In partnership with the Library's Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) and the Law Library of Congress, CRS continues to actively engage with data partners, including the House Clerk, Secretary of the Senate, the Government Publishing Office (GPO), and the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) to modernize legislative data interchanges for Congress.gov. For example, the Service is working

with data partners to replace legacy data processing workflows with new data interchanges that will better safeguard congressional data and enable potential future enhancements. This effort is targeted for completion by the end of fiscal year 2023. Recent enhancements to Congress.gov have improved access to accurate, timely, and complete legislative information. These include release of the beta Application Programming Interface (API) that enables direct access to Congress.gov legislative and congressional data; customizable data elements for downloading; and increasing the download limit five-fold. Additional enhancements include automated appropriations measure searches by specific fiscal years and an alerts capability available for appropriations measures considered by Congress. CRS and its Library colleagues continue to appreciate the ongoing, high-performing partnerships with House, Senate, and GPO colleagues as legislative data workflows, tools, and standards continue to be modernized through collaborative efforts.

Conan Modernization

Known officially as the “Constitution of the United States of America: Analysis and Interpretation,” CONAN serves as the official record of the U.S. Constitution for Congress. In 2019, CRS collaborated with OCIO and the Law Library to introduce a new website for CONAN: constitution.congress.gov. The site features hundreds of pages of updated constitutional analysis and content. Last fiscal year, CRS legislative attorneys continued to provide comprehensive analysis of the Supreme Court’s jurisprudence as it relates to every provision of the U.S. Constitution, including the implications of recently decided cases. To make CONAN more accessible to online users, new and existing content has been drafted and revised in the form of short, granular essays that focus on specific, discrete topics. Since the launch of the public website, CONAN has received over fourteen million unique visitors and its pages have been viewed over thirty-five million times.

IT Modernization/Integrated Research and Information Systems (IRIS)

The Integrated Research and Information System (IRIS) initiative is a multi-year effort to modernize the Service’s mission-focused technology to provide CRS staff with the best resources to create and deliver products and services to meet the needs of an ever changing Congress. During fiscal year 2022, CRS, in collaboration with OCIO, continued to execute on

several major efforts including Authoring; Content Management; and CRS.gov website redesign, as well as the Text Analysis Program (TAP), CRS's legislative analysis application. These efforts align with the Library's technical direction and Legislative Branch cloud strategies. New software and platforms are developed using an agile framework, permitting increased opportunities for stakeholders to test the software during the development phase, ensuring the delivered product meets all defined requirements. Solutions are informed by both internal CRS staff as well as our congressional stakeholders, and are moving forward consistent with contractual specifications, schedules, and resources. CRS anticipates releasing the modernized Congressional Request Management System, Authoring and Document Management System and TAP modernized solution into production in 2023. The Library's Cloud Smart strategy and continuous integration/continuous delivery (CI/CD) practices will provide CRS with the ability to more quickly evaluate and adopt emerging technologies to further enhance these critical systems.

Recruitment and Retention of a Highly Qualified and Productive Workforce

CRS continues to recruit, retain, and professionally develop a diverse, highly-skilled workforce to support Congress. Specific goals are identified in the CRS Operations Plan around recruitment, training, and communications. Updates on these efforts are communicated to staff through messages from leadership, CRS's staff newsletter, and our newly developed internal Diversity and Inclusion website.

The Service developed and executed a recruitment plan for merit selection positions that includes outreach to potential applicants from underrepresented groups to expand awareness of opportunities at CRS and enhance the pool of highly-qualified candidates. During fiscal year 2022, CRS participated in over 30 recruitment events, many of which were sponsored by minority-serving institutions and schools or organizations with a focus on underrepresented groups and has participated in eleven events thus far in fiscal year 2023. The Service also supported a variety of paid summer internship opportunities through the Student Diversity and Inclusion Internship Program. In fiscal year 2022, CRS completed its capstone project with Texas A&M University's Bush School of Government to research strategies for improving the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce. CRS is in the process of reviewing the capstone

recommendations to implement as appropriate. Additionally, CRS is actively engaged with other Library of Congress offices to conduct a barrier analysis focused on the CRS workforce.

The Service continues to offer training opportunities for leadership, writing, and presentation skills and has developed customized statistics and data training courses to support staff professional development, among other professional developmental opportunities. Additionally, CRS engages staff through a variety of means, including working groups to inform strategic planning, such as the Products Advisory Working Group.

Knowledge Management

CRS is developing and implementing strategies to manage, preserve, and capture the institutional knowledge that it relies upon to provide exceptional service to Congress. The Service utilizes its Research Portal as a hub for digital resources, providing staff with quick and easy access to information needed to research, analyze, and advise on legislative issues. The Research Portal was particularly useful during the COVID-19 pandemic when most CRS staff were working remotely, but its utility has continued since the resumption of onsite operations. By the end of fiscal year 2022, four additional sites were added to bring the total number of collections on the Portal to 46. In addition, CRS continued efforts to capture and transfer tacit knowledge held by senior analysts, attorneys, and information professionals. Activities to facilitate the sharing of information, knowledge, and best practices have enabled new staff to learn from the experience of their colleagues. In addition, CRS has expanded the focus of its newly rebranded Knowledge Management Working Group to include developing recommendations for the upcoming strategic planning cycle.

Optimizing Operational Efficiencies

The second strategic goal of CRS' directional plan is to optimize resource utilization. Over the last several years, CRS has developed and installed new processes and tools to modernize administrative operations. The Service's operations team leverages existing systems such as a government travel system to more efficiently manage travel in support of research, congressional support and professional development. Similarly, CRS uses the Serena SBM system to process personnel actions. We have automated systems to manage meeting space and property passes. By

replacing inefficient paper based systems, CRS is able to operate more effectively, identify and resolve problems sooner, and manage records more efficiently.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Meeting the needs of Members and staff is CRS's highest priority, and the Service remains committed to its mission to serve Congress with the highest quality of research, analysis, information and confidential consultation. Yet, with current budgetary constraints, existing CRS capabilities to support Congress's evolving needs and ever growing workload are stretched exceedingly thin. CRS works to manage and optimize its resources as efficiently as possible. However, the Service's ability to support a modern Congress will depend on its ability to address the challenges and leverage the opportunities illustrated in part below.

Recruitment and Retention of a Diverse Professional Workforce

The strength of CRS lies in our staff, who bring a breadth of analytical talent to bear on virtually every issue of interest to Congress, as well as support the infrastructure needed to effectively serve Congress. CRS analysts, legislative attorneys, and information professionals offer not only subject matter expertise, but intimate knowledge of the legislative process as well as decades of institutional memory. The Service is constantly seeking to replenish and strengthen this capacity to ensure that Congress continues to have access to top-notch expertise across the range of public policy issues on its agenda. Moreover, the Service must be able to recruit expertise in emerging disciplines. However, successful recruitment and retention of superior expertise is dependent on CRS's ability to effectively compete for talent with employers in the public and private sector; particularly with respect to skillsets and expertise that are in great demand. CRS continues to explore existing opportunities to promote staff retention, however, CRS would be better positioned to attract and retain such talent if it were equipped with the resources to attract professionals, especially in areas of critical need.

Increasing Capacity in Areas Important to Congress

In response to congressional interest, CRS works to create and increase capacity in identified areas. For example, Congress has instructed CRS to improve the timeliness of bill summaries. Due in part to an increase in the volume of bills introduced, the growing complexity of

legislative proposals, along with inadequate staff capacity within its Legislative Information Services (LIS) Bill Digesting team, there is a substantial backlog of legislative bills waiting to be summarized and published on Congress.gov. To address this issue, CRS's budget request for fiscal year 2024 includes 2.671 million dollars and 16 FTE to provide the staffing capacity necessary to eliminate the backlog, improve the timeliness of bill summary publication and to support the continued improvement of Congress.gov.

Leveraging Data Science and New Analytical Approaches

Moreover, CRS is facing a growing demand from Congress to perform quantitative data analysis and policy simulation to provide congressional requestors with a more granular perspective of the impact of legislative proposals. While CRS has limited capability to conduct such analysis, it lacks the capacity to provide this service on a broader scale. In addition, Congress has expressed an interest in CRS exploring the use of artificial intelligence applications to support its work. To address these interests, the Service is requesting just over three million dollars and 2 NTE as part of its fiscal year 2024 budget to contract personnel and to invest in the software, data sets, and infrastructure required to perform and present the data analysis pilot. These requested program increases reflect CRS's ongoing commitment to keep pace with an increasingly busy Congress and to provide the superior level of research and analytical support to which Congress has become accustomed.

Effective Adoption of Emerging Technology

Finally, supporting a modern Congress requires CRS to keep pace with rapidly evolving advancements in technology. CRS utilizes IT in virtually every aspect of its operation and access to reliable, state of the art technology is critical to the support CRS provides to Congress. Investments in technology provide CRS an opportunity to leverage the benefits associated with IT to be more efficient and to provide new products and services for Congress. However, as the pace of technological innovation accelerates, so too does the cost associated with acquiring and maintaining these necessary tools.

CONCLUSION

Chairwoman Bice, Ranking Member Kilmer and members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of my colleagues at CRS, I would like to express my appreciation to the Committee on House Administration for its continued support. CRS looks forward to the Committee's input as we seek to improve products and services and strengthen operational capabilities in our ongoing effort to be the premier source of research and analysis for the first branch of government, the United States Congress.