

**Testimony of Audrey Henson, CEO and Founder, College to Congress**  
**Before the United States House of Representatives Select Committee on**  
**Modernization of Congress**

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Chair Kilmer, Vice-Chair Timmons, and Members of the Committee, interns are the staffers of tomorrow. Many even go on to become Members or continue their service as public servants in local, state, or federal government. Currently, each office handles intern recruitment and training in their own ways. Unlike most institutions or private companies, there is no formal or standardized onboarding or training, which places the burden on the office—usually a junior-level staffer—to cultivate the next generation of leaders on their own accord without any formal guidance. If Congress is serious about ensuring that future interns are diverse, ready to excel on day one, and better serve constituents, then Congress should take steps to implement standardized and formal onboarding and training for interns in a dedicated Human Resources office.

The lack of formal onboarding and recruitment poses limitations to the body's ability to recruit and retain a diverse background of interns more representative of the American people. Offices tend to favor and select students predominantly from elite universities that have ample resources and connections. Oftentimes, the Hill overlooks community colleges, state schools, HBCUs, and universities further away from D.C. with fewer connections, resulting in a homogenous talent pool of Hill-hire applicants. Standardizing the House's recruitment and onboarding processes while ensuring Members still have the discretion to choose who can best serve in their office will open avenues for a broader range of skills with various backgrounds serving constituents.

Formalizing and standardizing the orientation and education given to new interns and congressional staff ensures that interns possess the skills necessary to serve constituents on day one. This can be accomplished by matching interns and staff with internal resources, such as those offered through the Congressional Staff Academy, and by leveraging external resources, such as the training programs offered by College to Congress and by organizations within the Fix Congress cohort. These actions lessen the burden on junior-level staff, who also have not received adequate training, that constantly monitor interns instead of focusing on their responsibilities.

Creating a Human Resources office will not only prepare and train interns to excel in their position, but increase diversity in knowledge, skills, and backgrounds. Congressional staff shape policies that affect every household in America; however, they are not entirely representative of the American people and the various socioeconomic backgrounds across America. Many staffers lack real-world experience, are heavily dependent on secondary education, and come from affluent socioeconomic backgrounds. Creating a government more reflective of its people will make Congress more effective and efficient.

In all, Congress must address its lack of intellectual diversity and commit to preparing and formalizing employees' and interns' onboarding processes. Offices will still be allowed discretion to decide who is best qualified to serve in their offices, and a formalized process will help make those decisions. Still, the lack of standardized training and onboarding will continue to hinder the institution until it is addressed. We ask that in order to create a more effective representative body and ensure the next generation of leaders are adequately prepared and representative of the people they serve, the body institutes changes to its processes that will result in a better experience for Members, offices, staff, interns, and most importantly, constituents.