



Testimony of Danielle Radovich Piper
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Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress
Congress Back Home: Modernizing District Office Operations
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Good afternoon, Chairman Kilmer, Vice-Chairman Timmons, Members of the Committee and staff. My name is Danielle Radovich Piper, I am Chief of Staff to Congressman Ed Perlmutter, CO-07. I have had the pleasure of serving in my capacity as Chief of Staff since January of 2007, and I have the unique perspective of being based in the District Office since first opening our offices. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding modernizing district office procedures.

I would like to begin my remarks by praising the creation of the CAO Coach Program. Since its inception last summer, the CAO Coach, in my opinion, is by far the most helpful and informative program the House has stood up in my 15 years on the Hill. Additionally, the trainings and briefings provided for staff through the Staff Academy are insightful, relevant and a tremendous opportunity to provide staff with professional trainings for on and off the Hill work. I sincerely hope this Committee and all Members of the House will continue to support the CAO Coach Program and encourage its future growth.

Over the years our district office, like many others, has grappled with technological challenges, antiquated House/Agency systems and confusion regarding the use of the appropriate House support office depending on our need at any given time. Regardless of these challenges we found a way to make it work to provide the best service possible to our constituents. However, I believe many of these problems can be solved if we reduce barriers and modernize systems.

I will begin with a few of the technological challenges we have experienced. Over the years our district office has grappled with the speed at which our office accesses and

transmits electronic information. We tried many fixes to the problem from re-wiring to purchasing our own server, neither of which alleviated the problem. The main issue is the House firewall and the need for data to travel to and from DC with every click, thus causing a slow network resulting in lost staff time and less productivity. One solution is to allow offices to use a secure Cloud system thus removing the obstacle of the time it takes for data to travel back and forth. Another problem for district offices is the lack of WiFi capability. Since the House does not support WiFi in district offices we resort to work-a-arounds such as the use of hot spots. As we all experienced with the pandemic, having access to WiFi is critical for a fully functioning office and would provide staff more flexibility to be more mobile within the office workspace.

Next, I would like to offer several thoughts regarding casework and the interaction with agencies.

- Digital Privacy Release forms:
 - There needs to be a consistent use of this form across all agencies. USCIS and the Passport Office are the only two agencies that do not allow the use of a digital signature. It makes the casework in these high-volume issue areas more cumbersome, tedious and time consuming for both staff and the constituent.
 - Moving to digital privacy release forms significantly cut down on administrative time for staff in submitting inquiries.
- Faxes:
 - Not all agencies have 'gone digital' and some still use the fax. Eliminating the use of the fax across all agencies is another example that would greatly increase the productivity of the casework team and their ability to serve constituents in a timely manner.
- Agency contact lists:
 - CRS provides a helpful agency guide, but it only has one point of contact for each agency and all are located in DC. Casework teams require a list of the local field offices within each agency's region which includes contact names, phone numbers and email addresses. Social Security, for example, provides a spreadsheet of all their field offices, which includes manager phone numbers and email addresses.
- Service Academy applications:
 - Automating our application system in 2011 was incredibly helpful to us and it significantly cut down on the administrative time it took to process applications. However, we understand many offices struggle with automating this process without help from a vendor. One idea for the House or CMS providers to consider is creating a template for offices to use. This would eliminate the need for offices to use an outside vendor such as Jotform which is an additional cost to the office.

- CRS inquiry reports:
 - Standardizing these reports across all agencies would reduce confusion, increase staff efficiencies, and ultimately result in better outcomes for the constituent.

As I mentioned earlier in this testimony, standing up the CAO Coach Program is a tremendous tool for us coupled with each office having a customer advocate has helped streamline communications and clear up some confusion regarding the CAO. I hope this program will be highlighted and reiterated during new member orientation and that each new member and their designated staffer will have the opportunity to meet one on one with their customer advocate. New member orientation for me was overwhelming and at times confusing so I would have appreciated the ability to go to one person with questions rather than sifting through a document of people all of whom perform different duties that I wasn't yet familiar.

Lastly, I would like to take a moment to highlight several events I hope the House will continue to support. We participate in each of these events, and they all contribute greatly to the lives of our constituents and our community.

The first is the Vietnam pinning program. Established in 2007 by an Act of Congress and a subsequent presidential proclamation, the United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration started with a presidential event at the national Vietnam Veterans Memorial on May 28, 2012, and will run through Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 2025. The lapel pins were created to recognize, thank and honor veterans who served during the Vietnam War. These ceremonies were more successful than we ever imagined. Our first pinning ceremony was held on March 24, 2017, and since that time we have held eight pinning ceremonies honoring more than 900 Colorado Vietnam-era Veterans.

The second is the Veterans History Project. We launched the program in our office in 2007 and produced in conjunction with local community colleges and high schools 4 feature-length films and several other smaller interviews where we interviewed dozens of Veterans serving in many different theaters around the world from Iwo Jima to Vietnam to the Gulf War.

The third is the Congressional Art Show. We have participated in the Art Show nearly every year since 2007 and have worked with hundreds of students to display their creations in our district and in the halls of congress. Many of these students are alternative learners and the program provides these young people, in many cases, with an experience they would not otherwise be afforded.

Lastly, the STEM App Challenge is another favorite of our office. However, it could be improved with allowing offices more flexibility in hosting the event. Specifically, the event is normally held in the Fall, but for us it works better for our

school districts to hold the event in the Spring. We have higher participation at that time which results in a better more robust event.

Thank you Mr. Chair, Vice-Chair, Members and staff for taking the time to hear my testimony today. I hope the Committee finds my thoughts helpful as you work toward modernizing House procedures. I look forward to answering your questions.