

Chairman Ryan, Ranking Member Herrera-Beutler, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Open World Leadership Center's fiscal year 2022 budget request. The budget request is for level funding in 2022 that will continue to provide support for operating expenses of the Center. There is an additional item of note in the budget request: the Board of Trustees' vote to change the name of the Center to the Congressional Office for International Leadership, a name that more accurately reflects the mission and Congressional affiliation of the agency.

As a unique congressional center and resource, Open World is the dynamic catalyst for hundreds of international projects and partnerships that constituents have developed with emerging leaders throughout the countries of Eurasia and Europe.

More than 8,000 volunteer American families in all 50 states have hosted more than 29,000 young professionals. Our dedicated hosts immersed these professionals in American life, values and practices, while contributing an estimated \$1.5 to \$2.0 million in cost shares annually.

Americans from all walks of life have had to adjust the way they conduct business because of the global pandemic. The Center began by

asking the question: how does an exchange program re-invent itself in the time of COVID when there is no international travel?

The program came to a complete halt and sent us all home on March 18, 2020. However, the challenges brought on by the pandemic, created an opportunity to bring delegates into the homes of Americans across the country *virtually*.

As we settled into teleworking, the staff rallied to create a vibrant and extensive virtual Open World program. Using Zoom because of its unique ability to accommodate simultaneous interpretation, each tele-delegation was introduced to their future program organizers and the local families that would host them.

In less than a year, staff designed, developed, and implemented 120 virtual programs with nearly 8,000 people participating from all OW countries. This programming engaged Members of Congress and their staff as well as hundreds of American host families and program speakers/presenters.

Unexpected benefits emerged from our virtual programming as our efforts to utilize teleconferencing revealed the strength of the relationships Open World has helped to form. From every country, every region, every walk of life, our alumni from all OW countries joined in virtual reunions. The impact of Congressional participation in all these virtual events was significant and memorable, especially for the

many American hosts who joined in. Constituents throughout the country are proud to be part of the Open World brand of citizen diplomacy. They know that they are building bridges between Main Street America and countries in transition.

In Fiscal Year 22 we plan to increase the number of visiting delegations substantially. New delegations will follow the pre-existing groups delayed by the pandemic. To the extent circumstances permit, we plan to increase the depth and breadth of our programs including pilot programs in Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria.

And, finally, in our efforts to stay up to date organizationally, the Center embarked on a project that involves the digitization of our records. A digital archive will allow the Center to demonstrate its effectiveness and tell its success story. With advanced analytics, the Center will leverage data to make a more modern and effective agency.

The archive will not only showcase this unique example of cooperation between the Congress—the branch of government closest to its citizens—and the countless American communities that have partnered with the Center, but also document the Center’s nimble, peer-to-peer approach to exchanges.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today. Your interest in and support of the OWLC is paramount for our continued success.