

Statement of J. Brett Blanton
Architect of the Capitol



Architect of the Capitol Fiscal Year 2022 Appropriations

**Statement before the Subcommittee on Legislative Branch,
Committee on Appropriations, United States House of Representatives**

March 11, 2021

Chairman Ryan, Ranking Member Herrera Beutler, and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to present the Architect of the Capitol's (AOC) Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 budget request of \$865 million.

It has been a whirlwind year since I last sat before you only a few weeks into my tenure as the 12th Architect of the Capitol. In that time, I have been amazed by the level of commitment and professionalism displayed by our staff. We have been in pandemic operations for nearly a year, we supported three lying in state or honor ceremonies, we survived a building breach on January 6 and we successfully prepared and supported the presidential inauguration.

Last year when I testified before the Subcommittee, I committed to conducting a top-down assessment of the agency to identify the most urgent needs and address the critical issues. The agency's FY 2022 budget request is the result of that review and serves as the beginning of the transformation of the AOC into a world-class service agency. Additionally, this budget request serves as the foundation for the future of the Capitol campus.

This request introduces several new initiatives that will address many of the most critical needs of the AOC and the Capitol community, including committing ourselves to long-term planning and developing strategies that will prepare the campus for the next century.

One of these strategies is the development of an Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) system to aid decision making regarding operating, maintaining and renewing facilities and infrastructure assets such as buildings, plants, machinery, vehicles and construction equipment in a manner that achieves industry standards and best business practices. Coupled with a commitment to better ensure our request is aligned with expected service levels, we will use EAM to proactively administer maintenance-based strategies, reduce the deferred maintenance backlog, mitigate obsolescence, restore reliability, reduce long-term costs and provide a system to forecast resource needs requirements to ensure assets are secured, maintained and meet industry standards for viability. Numerous studies have shown that the ISO 55000 certified EAM system we will implement has a return on investment of approximately five years.

This budget also reinforces my commitment to the AOC's employees by developing a human capital strategy that will bolster our efforts to acquire, develop, train and retain a talented, diverse and highly skilled workforce that is prepared for the future. We aim to transform the AOC's human capital landscape by ensuring workforce readiness, closing skills gaps and maximizing employees' talents, skill sets and competencies.

In addition, we will strengthen access to skills training by establishing a new AOC University, which will ensure people have the skills to perform their jobs well and can improve their skills to better position themselves for advancement. It will also transform the organization and culture of the AOC by investing in employee outreach and training programs that focus on skill-building activities designed to improve employee and stakeholder experiences, teach conflict resolution skills and improve teamwork and customer service.

As I have said since my first day with the agency, the overall success of the AOC begins with our staff. The ability of our central services to support our front-line operations is critical to the organization's success. Included in this budget request is an aggressive plan to on-board critical staff who are essential toward supporting the needs and services of Congress.

The safety of members and staff on the Capitol campus is my highest priority. As such, code compliance is another area where we are seeking transformative change. Under the proposed Building Official Program, dedicated experts will ensure stakeholders follow the same set of established building codes and request approval of their work through a permit process. The agency will track all construction and infrastructure work in a centralized data, management and oversight system. This proposal allows for independent verification that infrastructure and construction work performed at AOC-managed facilities and grounds consistently meets established building codes and enterprise facility standards. This is similar to the model used by many at state and local governments and will ensure safe and code-compliant work on the Capitol campus.

Additional staffing is also required to meet the emerging requirements to ensure the cleanliness of the Capitol campus as we transition to a new normal after the COVID threat. This budget request introduces the concept of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for janitorial services. These SLAs transparently outline specific levels of cleanliness and the associated cost for these services. In future budgets, we will expand these SLAs to all products and services the AOC delivers so there are measurable standards of service on the Capitol campus.

Regarding our continued COVID-19 response, as I mentioned in our hearing on February 24, 2021, our commitment toward ensuring that adequate measures are taken to mitigate the threat of COVID-19 across the Capitol campus has not been met with the required financial support. Other than our initial installment of funding, which is fully obligated, the AOC has been forced to use our critical infrastructure and security project funding to support Congress at a service level required for enhanced cleaning and acquire necessary personal protective equipment (PPE).

Maintaining vigilant and strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols, the AOC has successfully continued facility operations and delivered quality projects to Congress and our legislative and judicial branch partners. We completed phase two of the Cannon House Office Building Renewal project on time, resulting in 32 new member suites and office spaces for the Office of Legislative Counsel, Office of General Counsel, House Democracy Partnership, House Clerk and the House CAO. I'm also proud to report that the AOC's safety record on this project has far exceeded industry standards, which is a reflection of our continued commitment to worksite safety.

Phase three of the Rayburn House Office Building parking garage project was also completed on schedule. This project rehabilitated the northwest quadrant of the facility, supporting 488 vehicles and 26 bicycle parking spaces. We also began work on phase four of the project in November in the garage's southwest quadrant.

With the committee's encouragement, we launched the Urban Agriculture Resilience Program last spring to support food-growing programs at public gardens affected by COVID-19 and to address emerging food insecurities due to the global pandemic. We assisted 19 states and Washington, D.C. in the growing and distribution of produce to communities with food access challenges. This model was a success, and now with lessons learned and an experienced team in partnership agreements on board at the U.S. Botanic Garden, we believe this community support can be successfully expanded to encourage more COVID gardens.

In addition to this critical work, I am proud to announce that the AOC received its 16th consecutive unmodified clean audit opinion of its financial statement. We also received our ninth consecutive Certificate of Excellence in Accountability Reporting award from the Association of Government Accountants. These recognitions are evidence of our excellence in financial management and provide transparency of our stewardship of the public's funds.

The agency's FY 2022 capital budget request seeks to continue this progress by addressing over \$78 million in deferred maintenance needs across campus. It also invests almost \$90 million in projects that renew or improve aging infrastructure such as fire alarms, campus intrusion, environmental systems and electrical distribution.

The AOC's risk-based project prioritization process identified \$171.5 million for capital projects. Of this, \$92.7 million, or 54 percent, is for projects that did not receive funding in FY 2021. This includes the project to address the failed waterproofing system for the Cannon-Capitol Tunnel. Water infiltration has caused staining on walls and unsafe conditions for pedestrians. If not funded, tunnel conditions will continue to deteriorate, requiring additional water management intervention and more expensive and disruptive construction.

The agency is also requesting funding for critical utility distribution projects at the Capitol Power Plant and offsite facilities. Funding is required for Phase 5 of the Refrigeration Plant Revitalization program, which will remove 40-year-old piping and includes various replacements and additions to bring the older West Refrigeration Plant equipment up to date. Earlier this year, chilled water piping broke and spilled over 200,000 gallons of water a day and impacted servers and congressional recording studio spaces. Phase 5 of the Refrigeration Plant Revitalization is imperative to prevent a complete shutdown of various congressional operations if another pipe breaks. Off-campus, we need to replace aging units with dual-use, energy-efficient units within the data centers to reduce the risk of interruption to daily operations, reduce energy consumption and reduce our carbon footprint.

As I mentioned earlier, code compliance is an important element in this request. We are seeking to address critical upgrades to life safety systems across campus. Fire alarm and sprinkler system upgrades at the U.S. Capitol, U.S. Botanic Garden and the James Madison Memorial Building will address code deficiencies, reduce the risk of system failure and improve facility safety for building occupants.

I would also like to mention the continued need to address a growing backlog of work at the aging Library of Congress facilities. Stained-glass window and roof repairs at the Thomas Jefferson Building are long overdue, and the failure to properly address water infiltration stemming from the James Madison Memorial Building's sixth floor terrace poses a threat to the historical collections housed in this facility.

Finally, as we continue to assess the Capitol's future facility needs in the aftermath of the January sixth breach, I also ask for the subcommittee's support of a campus-wide facility assessment.

During my selection and confirmation process, I promised to transform the AOC. This budget request is the first step in that transformation. Additionally, last year, I promised to emphasize deferred maintenance and emergent needs required for our facilities. I am confident that this request, coupled with the changes we are actively incorporating throughout the agency, represents a major step forward and the beginning of the future for the AOC.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of our FY 2022 budget request.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer your questions.