

**Statement of J. Brett Blanton
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Security of the Capitol Campus since the Attack of January 6, 2021

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

January 11, 2022

Chairman Ryan, Ranking Member Herrera Beutler, and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today. Immediately following the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol, the Architect of the Capitol (AOC) began a lengthy and ongoing recovery process, and I appreciate the support of this Subcommittee and the entire Congress in this endeavor. Thank you for the opportunity to update you on our completed actions, ongoing progress and outstanding needs.

The events of January 6th were difficult to witness and extremely hard for everyone on the Capitol campus to experience. AOC staff had spent weeks preparing the U.S. Capitol Grounds and the platform for the 59th Presidential Inauguration. As crowds took over the grounds, we moved our staff indoors, only to watch the weeks of work and preparation for the inauguration torn apart.

As the widely viewed images have shown, over the course of that day, the U.S. Capitol and the inaugural platform sustained substantial damage. The crowds wrecked the platform and smashed windows. Sound systems and photography equipment were stolen or damaged. During those harrowing hours, AOC personnel sheltered congressional staff, raced to the roof to reverse building airflows to help clear the air of chemical irritants, and provided water and eye-wash stations to U.S. Capitol Police officers in need of assistance.

Once security officials had cleared the building, AOC employees worked tirelessly to clean up and begin repair work. Carpenters covered windows and doors with plywood to secure the building, laborers removed glass and broken furniture to enable Congress to continue its work, and painters carefully repainted the inaugural platform.

Through their resilient and unwavering efforts, AOC staff ensured that Congress could go back to work while also completing their own tasks to finalize preparations for the inauguration. Together, we demonstrated our nation's determination to support a peaceful transition of power. Since that day, the AOC has received thousands of letters and emails from grateful citizens thanking the AOC and its employees for their service during these challenging times. These letters are an important reminder of the work we do on behalf of all the American people.

Physical Security

Of course, as is the focus of today's hearing, physical security is of paramount importance across the Capitol campus. Throughout my tenure, security infrastructure improvements have been a top priority. In October 2020, I consolidated all AOC security and emergency management functions under a new position called the Chief Security Officer (CSO). This new, consolidated office has enabled us to rapidly respond to emergency management needs in a comprehensive manner across the Capitol campus.

In close and continuous coordination with my counterparts at the U.S. Capitol Police, as well as the House and Senate Sergeant at Arms, we already have put significant effort into addressing identified needs. Additionally, the AOC executed several campus-wide lighting, alarm and

grounds maintenance projects. Other work related to external lighting, barrier improvements and window repairs is ongoing, as are several projects related to improving security around the House Chamber and leadership offices in the U.S. Capitol.

In the aftermath of the physical damage resulting from events on January 6th, the AOC took immediate action to fund physical security-related measures by reallocating funds from other projects and priorities. I appreciate your support to transfer funds from the Library Buildings and Grounds Module 7 project at Ft. Meade, Maryland. These funds were necessary for the above-mentioned security assessment, fencing and support of the National Guard soldiers. As the Subcommittee knows, we also had to address work interruptions to several construction projects during and after January 6th. I am disappointed, however, that the Library Buildings and Grounds Module 7 project was not reimbursed in the Security Supplemental. This project is critical to ongoing Library of Congress operations.

Every day, the AOC is continuing to work with our partners and stakeholders to award the projects identified in the Security Supplemental, in addition to needs identified by other assessments and surveys. With support from this Subcommittee, we initiated a comprehensive facility security assessment that will inform any new security enhancements and will strengthen the security posture of the Capitol campus. Informed by this assessment, the AOC is working with our Capitol Police Board partners to identify all required physical security projects for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 budget request.

As a Member of the Capitol Police Board, I am grateful for this Committee's robust support for the brave and hard-working women and men of the U.S. Capitol Police. As this Committee considers further appropriations for campus-wide security improvements for the Capitol Police, it is imperative that you consider the additional requirements and costs levied on the AOC to support those initiatives. We look forward to working with you to address these urgent and necessary requirements.

The AOC's FY 2023 budget will illustrate a renewed emphasis to support the security needs of Congress, the Supreme Court as well as the entire Capitol campus. Our request will also highlight the need to reimburse project funding that was reallocated to support urgent security needs. In addition, future budget submissions will reflect agency-wide efforts to transform the agency by adopting a more predictive approach to facilities maintenance. As we exercise a disciplined, consistent approach in response to annual inspections and key infrastructure lifecycles, we will mitigate costs associated with deferred maintenance requirements. Taken together, these important, long-term initiatives will improve our efficiency and will also contribute toward a more secure environment across the Capitol Complex.

Employee Wellness

As I have said since my first day with the agency, the overall success of the AOC begins with our staff. Our ability to support our front-line operations is critical to the success of the AOC as well as the Congress.

I want to express my deep appreciation to the employees of the AOC. During my tenure, I have been continually impressed by our team members' professionalism and commitment to service. Their actions on January 6th deserve our respect and admiration. Beyond the ongoing repairs from the damage related to this event, the physical work is only half of the story. As Members and congressional staff know, personal recovery from the trauma of that day is ongoing. To that end, we have developed a series of programs to provide services and support to all staff. AOC staff can participate in mental, physical and financial wellness webinars. In addition, the AOC has a robust wellness program that includes a wide range of initiatives, including a Step Challenge, healthy eating demonstrations and a Wellness Champions Program.

Additionally, I have enhanced the AOC Employee Assistance Program (EAP). It is a free, voluntary and confidential program that assists employees as they work through the stress of personal or professional challenges. Employees and family members also have access to TalkNow, which offers immediate, 24/7 telephonic access to confidential counseling support delivered by qualified behavioral health professionals. Going into next year, EAP will provide additional resources relating to the "anniversary effect" of tragic events, as well as specialized programs on building resiliency. Employees can also access behavioral health services that provide a number of helpful resources like monthly topical webinars, articles, tools, videos, training and screenings.

I remain committed to maintaining a positive and supportive climate where people have the best skills, training, and equipment to serve Congress on behalf of the American people.

Pandemic Response

Amid all the efforts to address physical security across campus since January 6th, the AOC has also continued to support the pandemic response efforts of the legislative branch. Since March 2020, AOC has implemented pandemic protocols and procurement of bulk pandemic supplies across the Capitol Complex.

As the Congress labors day and night to do its work, AOC employees are working nonstop to keep the campus clean, sanitized, and well maintained to enable Members of Congress and congressional staff to do their jobs safely. The AOC team continues to meet campus needs by serving as the legislative branch purchasing agent for personnel protective equipment (PPE), managing the specialized cleaning of spaces identified by our partners and assessed by the Office of Attending Physician, and ensuring the facilities and utilities are well maintained for ongoing and future congressional needs. In addition, AOC is now involved with the procurement of at-home test kits for the House, Senate, Capitol Police and AOC staff. As you know, these demands have only gone up over the past few weeks as the entire area has experienced a tremendous surge in cases.

Looking ahead, AOC will continue to meet any needs as they arise. As the Committee is well aware, we continue to face unprecedented times and the unforeseen and growing costs associated with the purchasing of inventory and testing kits is draining our agency's resources.

We are extremely appreciative of the funds you provided for pandemic response in the CARES Act as well as the Security Supplemental. As we work through the shortfalls created by the growth in requirements, we look forward to coordinating with you to address the growing needs and anticipated shortfalls at existing funding levels. We know our efforts are critical to the safety of Members and the staff working on the Capitol campus and are proud of the role we play in ensuring the continuity of operations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I remain optimistic that we will achieve our goals so long as we have the adequate resources. At the same time, we cannot let down our guard. Significant investments are necessary to meet our physical security needs in a manner that adheres to the requirements associated historic preservation.

As I have testified previously, delayed funding for projects has consequences. We need to work together to adopt a multi-year approach for planning, design and execution of major projects. Looking ahead, we need adequate, consistent funding for ongoing improvements. Otherwise, we may face vulnerabilities associated with the deterioration of these historic buildings and treasured grounds.

The U.S. Capitol is resilient, both in terms of its physical structure and its people. It is a shared responsibility for us to continue to protect and preserve this international symbol of democracy. Working together, we can achieve this goal. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to answering your questions.