

Statement of J. Brett Blanton
Architect of the Capitol



Architect of the Capitol Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations

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

April 27, 2022

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) 2023 budget request of \$1.67 billion.

As you know, the AOC supports the day-to-day operations of Congress, the Supreme Court and the Library of Congress. Carrying on traditions of unique craftsmanship and ingenuity, the AOC is responsible for the operations and care of more than 18.4 million square feet of facilities, 570 acres of grounds and thousands of works of art. The Capitol campus is home to 30,000 daily occupants, with more than 2,200 AOC employees serving around the clock in diverse roles to maintain and preserve the buildings and grounds.

Recognizing the trust placed in us by Congress and the American people, the AOC team is committed to providing a safe and inspiring experience for all who visit and work at this cherished symbol of democracy. Fundamentally, the overall success of the AOC begins with our staff. Every day, I strive to create a positive environment where AOC employees have the skills, training, equipment and support to serve Congress and the Supreme Court on behalf of the American people. I am committed to ensuring workforce readiness and maximizing employees' talents, skill sets and professional development. This budget emphasizes the importance of recruiting and retaining critical staff to accomplish this important work.

I. Capitol Security Comes First

Physical security is of paramount importance across the Capitol campus. Since my first day as Architect, physical security has been one of my top priorities. In close and continuous coordination with my counterparts at the U.S. Capitol Police (USCP) and the House and Senate Sergeants at Arms, we are committed to making the Capitol campus as safe and open as possible.

The AOC's FY 2023 budget request demonstrates a renewed emphasis to support the security needs throughout the Capitol campus. For this reason, security infrastructure projects constitute a significant portion of our budget request. As the Committee knows, the FY 2023 budget request reflects the urgent and significant recommendations of the comprehensive physical security assessment completed by the AOC on behalf of the Capitol Police Board. In the days ahead, I will continue to work with my partners on the Capitol Police Board to address the top priorities arising from this assessment. Some of the projects will be implemented quickly, while the complexity of others will require more design and fabrication effort. At the same time, there is constant coordination between the AOC's Chief Security Officer and the Capitol Police Board. Working together, we can achieve our shared mission and goals.

To that end, the AOC is requesting proportionate funds to support the USCP's increased operations so that the USCP can fully implement its own programs and address pressing needs. This budget reflects how the AOC and USCP security improvement projects are intertwined and aligned. For example, the AOC seeks funding to improve direct communication lines with USCP related to incident management, security responses and coordination. In addition, the AOC is seeking funding to support emergency response, security and resilience requirements of the

AOC's life, health and safety responsibilities to the Capitol Police Board. The requested funds will also provide necessary support for exigent requirements and special events that arise unexpectedly. Finally, the AOC is completing a design process for vestibules at the north and south entrances of the U.S. Capitol Building. The budget request includes funds for construction of these vestibules as well as the design of vestibules around the congressional office buildings.

In addition, the AOC is requesting resources to address a finding by the AOC's Inspector General regarding Emergency Management Training. With this requested funding, the AOC will be able to train and prepare AOC staff to respond to emergency situations, including natural disasters or other life safety emergency events. At the same time, the AOC is requesting resources to provide rapid response support to unplanned critical security events as well as rapidly deployable security elements. The budget request also reflects the AOC's ongoing efforts to improve cybersecurity and to protect our networks from any intrusion by malicious threats. The AOC maintains continuous 24/7 monitoring to detect and respond to any cyber incidents. Finally, this request reflects the AOC's increased responsibility to acquire pandemic response materials.

We know our efforts are critical to the safety of Members and the staff working on the Capitol campus, and we are dedicated to ensuring continuity of operations. With the Committee's full support, the AOC can fully achieve its responsibilities to support our partners as we work together to keep the campus safe and secure.

II. Tackling Deferred Maintenance with Modern Tools

I am continuing efforts to achieve transformative change across campus by deploying modern tools to tackle the challenges of aging facilities and infrastructure. Over the past two years, the pandemic has affected costs of all major projects in the form of supply chain shortages, raw material cost increases and increases in competition for skilled labor.

The AOC's capital budget request is focused on projects with immediate urgency. Project funding will support the lifespan of the facilities as well as address critical needs ranging from preserving priceless artwork to replacing roofs, installing emergency generators and improving campus security. The AOC's priority projects are focused on needs where the period of useful life has already been exhausted or is approaching its end.

Looking ahead, we are working on solutions that will improve predictability of maintenance needs and create efficiencies that will save taxpayer dollars. With the Committee's support, the AOC is launching a new Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) system that will provide a thorough asset management strategy to inform work priorities and provide for data-driven fiscal decisions and prioritization. Specifically, EAM will serve as a new tool to aid decision-making about operating, maintaining and renewing building and infrastructure assets such as machinery, vehicles and construction equipment. With sufficient resources for ongoing implementation, EAM will allow the AOC to manage maintenance-based strategies proactively, mitigate obsolescence, restore reliability, reduce long-term costs and forecast resource requirements.

EAM will also maximize return on investment while enhancing decision-making priorities. I am committed to implementing a disciplined, consistent approach to annual inspections and anticipating key infrastructure lifecycles. With this approach, the AOC can mitigate costs associated with deferred maintenance requirements.

Every day we work to preserve our historic and aging infrastructure for the benefit of future generations. At the same time, we are working tirelessly to upgrade our capabilities and facilities to meet the technological, space, sustainability and accessibility needs of a 21st-century workforce.

III. Maintaining a Safe Environment for All

The safety of everyone on the Capitol campus is a top priority. The budget request reflects prioritization of projects based on imminent needs. Life and safety issues, as well as components that are beyond their service life, are high on the list.

One critical area is the Capitol Power Plant's requests to address utility tunnel repairs. Within the utility tunnels, deteriorating concrete and piping components need immediate repair to reduce the risk of tunnel failure. These repairs are urgent to avoid interruptions of electrical, water, steam and communications services to the Capitol campus for an extended period.

In this area and others, we continue to dedicate time and attention to training, safety procedure review and communications, and supervision of our workforce to ensure they are operating in the safest manner possible across the entire campus. Fire alarm and sprinkler system upgrades at the U.S. Capitol and other critical areas will address code deficiencies, reduce the risk of system failure and improve facility safety for building occupants.

This year, we initiated the Building Official program, contracting with dedicated experts to ensure stakeholders follow the same set of established building codes and consistent processes for permitting. The FY 2023 budget request includes funding to expand the Building Official program beyond initial pilots, implementing it more broadly and providing staffing and resources for technically sound code reviews of construction efforts in AOC-managed facilities. This effort will identify performance standards to increase transparency and provide quantifiable standards linking service needs to resource requirements, ultimately contributing to a safer working environment in every facility.

Dedicated experts will ensure that established building codes and permits will be tracked for all construction and infrastructure work with a centralized data, management and oversight system. These procedures can be implemented for numerous projects to repair components and infrastructure that are at or beyond their service life. For example, planned projects include fire suppression system replacements and roof repairs on several buildings. Another example is reflected in the funding request for the kitchen and exhaust system on the House side of the U.S.

Capitol to accomplish exhaust upgrades and necessary improvements to dated electrical and plumbing systems.

The AOC is also seeking funds to begin asbestos removal in the Rayburn Building hallway ceilings. While the asbestos in the ceilings is safe if undisturbed, new coats of paint are no longer an effective mitigation due to the weight extra layers of paint will place on the ceiling surfaces. With the FY 2023 request, the AOC is seeking to begin the first year of a 10-year project to remove asbestos in the most safe, efficient and cost-effective manner possible. Rather than proceeding with piecemeal abatement, the AOC will achieve greater results by removing all the asbestos at one time in designated hallways in a phased approach during the course of the project by setting up appropriate safety measures and HEPA filtration in the planned work area.

Accessibility also remains a top priority, with accessibility considerations incorporated into every project. For example, as part of the U.S. Botanic Garden Conservatory Security Upgrade Project, the AOC is planning to install automatic door openers to improve accessibility. Several of the FY 2023 Line-Item Construction Projects incorporate accessibility work, including the Rayburn Building's west plaza courtyard waterproofing restoration project. This project will address waterproofing components that are more than 50 years old and have exceeded their lifespan of 15-20 years. Water has infiltrated and damaged stairwells in the lobbies below. As part of the project, there will be improved accessibility through a ramp extension, and the landscape will be restored to its original design, consistent with the House Office Buildings Complex Cultural Landscape Report.

The AOC is also focused on sustainability and energy conservation efforts that prioritize resource conservation. In fact, over the last 15 years, the AOC has reduced its energy intensity levels by 50 percent, reducing energy requirements and ultimately saving taxpayer dollars. Through its practices, the AOC sequestered 700,000 pounds of carbon dioxide, saved nearly 8 million gallons of water, and saved over 250,000 kilowatt-hours of energy on an annual basis.

In addition, the AOC continues to improve recycling programs, not only for personal use inside facilities but also on construction sites. For example, the AOC diverted 10,000 tons of construction and demolition debris from the landfill, recycling 98 percent of all construction debris generated. We also continue to implement sustainable groundskeeping practices such as reducing water demand by capturing runoff and using native plants and perennials.

Looking to the future, the AOC will begin work on an updated Capitol Complex Master Plan, which will serve as a foundational document for master planning over the next 20 years. The master plan will also incorporate findings and recommendations of the AOC's ongoing Transportation and Mobility Study. With the Committee's support, these reports will set forth a robust vision for future generations.

IV. Pushing Past the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic still permeates AOC operations and projects. As the Congress labors day and night, AOC employees are working nonstop to keep the entire 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 PPE, managing the specialized cleaning of spaces, and ensuring the facilities and utilities are well maintained for ongoing and future congressional needs.

As the Committee is aware, we are now welcoming school groups back to the U.S. Capitol. As we plan to welcome even more visitors back, we look forward to the launch of the CVC's Exhibition Hall Redesign Project later this year. This project aims to provide visitors with an engaging environment to learn about the legislative process and democracy. We look forward to welcoming students of all ages to this wonderful new space.

The U.S. Botanic Garden (USBG) also remains a treasured public institution. With the Committee's encouragement, we seek to continue the USBG's Urban Agriculture Program, which provides educational resources, training for veterans, capacity building programs with other public gardens, and educator professional development programming. In a short period, this program achieved demonstrated success to support communities facing food access challenges. In addition, the USBG is also requesting funding to complete design of a new Production Facility Renewal Project. With resources for substantial renovation and renewal of this critical support facility, the USBG can continue to achieve key goals related to horticulture, operations and maintenance, education and outreach, and sustainability.

V. Conclusion

The AOC has made significant progress on our transformational efforts. As I have testified previously, delayed funding for projects has consequences, and we need adequate, consistent funding for ongoing improvements. Otherwise, we may face vulnerabilities associated with the deterioration and deferred improvements of these historic buildings and treasured grounds.

We need to work together to adopt a multi-year approach for planning, design and execution of major projects. This budget submission also reflects agencywide efforts to transform the AOC by adopting a more predictive approach to facilities maintenance.

Across the board, I am committed to leading the agency in long-term, strategic planning that will prepare the campus for the next century. With your ongoing support, we can protect and preserve this cherished institution as well as all of those who serve here.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our FY 2023 budget request, and I look forward to the opportunity to address any questions.