

**Statement of Mary B. Mazanec
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Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
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APPROPRIATIONS

Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present the fiscal 2024 budget request for the Congressional Research Service (CRS). I would also like to express my appreciation to the Committee for your support of our fiscal 2023 request.

My testimony today will outline CRS's budget requirements for fiscal 2024, including two proposed programmatic increases that will bolster the Service's analytic capabilities and enhance the level of service provided to Congress. In addition, I will provide an overview of several noteworthy CRS accomplishments in its support for Congress during fiscal 2022, and update you on progress related to a number of our strategic initiatives.

SERVICE TO CONGRESS

CRS is dedicated to providing the highest quality of research, analysis, information, and confidential consultation to Congress. In fiscal 2022, CRS experts provided extensive support to Members, Committees and congressional staff on a wide range of legal and policy questions associated with issues including: antitrust, border security, climate change, cybersecurity, tax policy, immigration, the law of war, and the conflict in Ukraine. The Service worked closely with Congress in its consideration of issues and programs, proposed as part of the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, and the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023. CRS experts supported lawmakers and congressional staff as they considered the Continuing Appropriations and Ukraine Supplemental

Appropriations Act, reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, as well as enactment of the Postal Service Reform Act of 2022 and the America COMPETES Act of 2022. In addition, CRS staff continued to provide guidance on the legislative process, congressional oversight, and the annual appropriations bills.

During fiscal 2022, CRS continued its offering of seminars and programs for congressional staff, including sessions on tribal issues, national spectrum policy, tax credits for families, the U.S. economic recovery, a series of introductory and advanced Defense Institutes, and the Federal Law Update (FLU) which experienced a record number of registrations during the year. The Service also produced 86 videos and podcasts featuring CRS analysts and legislative attorneys discussing a myriad of topics including: defense and intelligence; homeland security and emergency management; science and technology; and healthcare.

In total during fiscal 2022, CRS experts responded to over 73,000 congressional requests; prepared nearly 1,100 new products; updated over 1,900 existing products; and conducted 264 seminars that were attended by approximately 10,000 congressional participants. In addition, CRS information specialists completed over 200 Geographical Information System (GIS) projects, incorporating visualized geographical data in a variety of CRS products. As in previous years, the Service provided support to almost every Member and Committee office through the provision of its products and services.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

CRS is committed to achieving the goals and objectives included in its 2019-2023 Directional Plan and I am pleased to report that the development of CRS's strategic goals and objectives for the next strategic planning cycle is already underway. The following is a summary of the Service's progress during fiscal 2022 in advancing some of the key initiatives undertaken to accomplish the goals set out in its current directional plan.

IT Modernization/Integrated Research and Information Systems (IRIS)

The Integrated Research and Information System (IRIS) initiative is a multi-year effort to update the Service's mission-specific information technology to provide CRS staff with the best resources to create and deliver products and services to Congress. During fiscal 2022 CRS, in collaboration with LC OCIO, continued to execute on several major work streams including Authoring; Content Management; CRS.gov website redesign; as well as the Text Analysis Program (TAP), CRS's legislative analysis application. The selected solutions align with the

Library’s technical roadmap and Legislative Branch cloud strategies. Solutions are developed using an agile framework, permitting stakeholders to incrementally validate the solution during the development phase, ensuring the delivered product meets all defined requirements. Solutions are informed by both internal CRS staff as well as our congressional stakeholders, and are moving forward consistent with contractual specifications, schedules, and resources. These efforts are essential to modernizing CRS mission critical applications to achieve the Library’s “digital first” strategy and meet the evolving needs of Congress. CRS anticipates releasing both the Authoring and Document Management modernized solution as well as the TAP modernized solution into production in fiscal 2023.

(CONAN) Modernization

Known officially as the “Constitution of the United States of America: Analysis and Interpretation,” CONAN serves as the official record of the U.S. Constitution for Congress. In 2019, CRS collaborated with OCIO and the Law Library to introduce a new website for CONAN: constitution.congress.gov. The new site features hundreds of pages of updated constitutional analysis and content. During fiscal 2022, CRS legislative attorneys continued to provide comprehensive analysis of the Supreme Court’s jurisprudence as it relates to every provision of the U.S. Constitution, including the implications of recently decided cases. To make CONAN more accessible to online users, new and existing content has been drafted and revised in the form of short, granular essays that focus on specific, discrete topics. CRS legal experts have also been preparing the print decennial 2022 edition of CONAN. Covering Supreme Court interpretations of the Constitution through the Court’s October 2021 term, the decennial 2022 edition features a revised format designed to integrate the print version of CONAN with its digital counterpart. Since the launch of the public website in 2019, CONAN has received over fourteen million unique visitors to the site and its pages have been viewed over thirty-five million times.

Recruitment and Retention of a Diverse and Productive Workforce

CRS continues to recruit, retain, and professionally develop a diverse, highly skilled workforce to meet the evolving needs of Congress. Specific goals for diversity and inclusion are identified in the CRS Operations Plan around recruitment, training, and communications. Updates on

diversity and inclusion efforts are communicated to staff through messages from leadership, CRS's staff newsletter, and our newly developed internal Diversity and Inclusion website. The Service has developed and executed a recruitment plan for merit selection positions that includes outreach to potential applicants from underrepresented groups. During fiscal 2022, CRS participated in over 30 recruitment events many of which were sponsored by minority-serving institutions and schools or organizations with a focus on underrepresented groups and has participated in eight events thus far in fiscal 2023. The Service also supported a variety of paid summer internship opportunities through the Student Diversity and Inclusion Internship Program. In fiscal 2022, CRS completed its capstone project with Texas A&M University's Bush School of Government to research strategies for improving the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce. CRS is in the process of reviewing the capstone recommendations to implement in fiscal 2023. Additionally, CRS is actively engaged with other Library of Congress offices to conduct a barrier analysis focused on the CRS workforce.

CRS hosted a number of programs for staff, that were aimed at fostering a more inclusive and respectful workplace such as "Leaving the Door Open for Inclusion;" "Generational Diversity;" and "Anti-Harassment Training." In addition, the Service continues to offer training opportunities for leadership, writing, and presentation skills and has developed customized statistics and data training courses to support staff professional development.

Knowledge Management

CRS is developing and implementing strategies to manage, preserve, and capture the institutional knowledge that it relies upon to provide exceptional service to Congress. The Service utilizes its Research Portal as a hub for digital resources, to provide staff with quick and easy access to information needed to research, analyze, and advise on legislative issues. The Research Portal was particularly useful during the COVID-19 pandemic when most CRS staff were working remotely, but its utility has continued since the resumption of onsite operations. By the end of fiscal 2022, four additional sites were added to bring the total number of collections on the Portal to 46. In addition, CRS continued its efforts to ensure the capture and timely transfer of the tacit knowledge held by senior analysts, attorneys, and information professionals. Activities to facilitate the sharing of information, knowledge, and best practices have enabled new staff to

learn from the experience of their colleagues. In addition, CRS has expanded the focus of its newly rebranded Knowledge Management Working Group to include developing recommendations for the upcoming strategic planning cycle. The Service also continued to implement its information resource instructional program, which provides staff with best practices on training techniques such as adult learning and virtual instruction, to enrich the training experience of congressional patrons.

Congress.gov

CRS partnered with OCIO to actively engage with House Clerk and Secretary of the Senate data partners to modernize legislative data interchanges. Targeted to be completed by the end of fiscal 2023, replacing legacy data processing workflows with new data interchanges will better safeguard congressional data and enable potential future enhancements. Fiscal 2022 enhancements to Congress.gov that have improved access to accurate, timely, and complete legislative information include: release of the beta Application Programming Interface (API) that enables direct access to structured Congress.gov legislative and congressional data; and customizable data elements for downloading, as well as increasing the download limit to 5,000 rows from 1,000. Additional enhancements included automated appropriations measure searches by specific fiscal years and an alerts capability available for appropriations measures considered by Congress (both in response to congressional client requests to improve information for appropriations). CRS and its Library colleagues continue to be appreciative of the ongoing high-performing partnerships with House, Senate, and GPO colleagues as legislative data workflows, tools, and standards continue to be modernized through collaborative efforts.

FISCAL 2024 BUDGET REQUEST AND PROGRAM INCREASES

The CRS budget request for fiscal 2024 is 146.574 million dollars, an increase of 12.974 million dollars (or 9.7 percent) over the amount appropriated for fiscal 2023. The requested increase includes 7.71 million dollars for mandatory pay related and price level increases. The proposal also includes program increases of 5.264 million dollars to bolster analytical capacity for CRS's bill digesting services, to support the continued development of Congress.gov, and to enhance the Service's quantitative analysis capabilities. As in previous fiscal years, staff pay and benefits accounts for approximately 90 percent of the amount requested by CRS.

Increased Capacity for Bill Summaries and Congress.gov

As part of its proposed program increase, CRS is requesting 2.671 million dollars and 16 FTE to address a backlog of legislative bill digest summaries and to continue development of Congress.gov. The publication of bill summaries is a function expressly mandated in CRS's authorizing statute and is a critical component of the searchable content made available to congressional users and the public on the Congress.gov website. Due to an increase in the volume of bills introduced, the growing complexity of legislative proposals, along with inadequate staff capacity within its Legislative Information Services (LIS) Bill Digesting team, CRS is experiencing a substantial backlog of bills requiring summarization. With regard to staffing, at present, a single LIS analyst serves as the sole subject matter expert for any given subject area and each analyst is responsible for digesting bills in multiple areas. This "one-deep" staffing configuration has proven problematic in responding to staff absences or unforeseen shifts in workload and is insufficient to keep pace with the rapid legislative activity occurring over the most recent Congresses.

Twelve (12) additional FTEs will allow CRS to create needed redundancies in subject area coverage to better respond to competing priorities and spikes in workload; to more efficiently distribute and manage the workload of incoming bills; and to improve the depth of expertise necessary to authoritatively analyze and summarize the complex legislation proposed by the modern-day Congress. The timeliness of bill summaries has been noted as an area of concern by the House Appropriations Committee and the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress. In requesting these new hires, CRS's objective is to, not only remedy the existing backlog, but improve the overall timeliness of bill summary publication.

In addition to addressing the bill summary backlog, CRS's request includes 4 FTEs to support the continuous development and day-to-day operation of Congress.gov. LIS staff work in close concert with congressional staff and the Library's OCIO on the modernization of congressional collections, formats, and capabilities for Congress.gov. The additional FTEs will be vital to sustain CRS's efforts to continue these enhancements as well as ensuring the day-to-day integrity of the Congress.gov system.

Quantitative Data Analysis Pilot

CRS's requested program increase for fiscal 2024 includes 3.080 million dollars and 2 NTE to develop a program to enhance the Service's capability to perform quantitative data analysis and policy simulation for congressional clients. In the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Congress encouraged CRS *"to explore ways to expand its ability to perform quantitative analysis of research data...."* and directed the Service to *"engage with an external entity to produce a report detailing the feasibility of CRS engaging in the analysis and modeling of big data sets by highlighting the information technology infrastructure, staffing, and analytical support required to establish and maintain such a capability."* This report language reflects the growing demand among Members and Committees for this type of analytical support from CRS. While CRS has conducted some limited quantitative analysis and policy simulation to evaluate the effects of certain types of legislation, currently it lacks the capacity to provide this service on a broader scale. Enhancing this area of its service offerings would enable CRS to provide congressional requestors with a more granular perspective of the impact of legislative proposals on various demographic groups, as well as the interaction of such policies with other programs.

CRS would utilize 2.593 million dollars of the requested amount to contract personnel (data scientists, programmers, and digital interface designers) to process data and support and maintain the simulation models in a cloud computing environment. The funds would also be used to invest in the software, data sets, and infrastructure required to perform, present, and maintain the data analysis and policy simulations. An additional 487 thousand dollars is requested on behalf of OCIO to hire 2 NTE to design and support the systems needed to implement the program, and to procure contractual support for needed IT security services. The entire 3.080 million dollars requested for the pilot will non-recur in fiscal 2028.

In addition to the initiatives outlined above, CRS's priorities for fiscal 2024 include planning the New Member Seminar in January 2025 for the newly elected Members of the 119th Congress; continuing to work with OCIO to modernize its IT infrastructure; and strengthening the diversity

and inclusiveness of its workforce and working environment. Of course, CRS's primary focus will be on the efficient delivery of its core products and services to support the important work of the 118th Congress.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Espallat, and Members of the Subcommittee, as we begin the 118th Congress, CRS stands ready as always to support the body's legislative, oversight, and representational activities with objective, nonpartisan and authoritative information and analysis. On behalf of my colleagues at CRS, I would like to thank the Committee for your unwavering support and for your consideration of our fiscal 2024 request.