



**STATEMENT BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH
ON THE OFFICE OF THE CLERK FY2024 BUDGET REQUEST**

THE HONORABLE CHERYL L. JOHNSON, CLERK OF THE HOUSE

MARCH 28, 2023

Chairperson Amodei and Ranking Member Espaillat, Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for inviting me to testify regarding the Office of the Clerk's operations as well as our fiscal year 2024 budget request. I would also like to thank you for your support and recognition of the vital role the Office of the Clerk plays in the ability of the Members to fulfill their constitutional responsibilities.

The past several months have been unique in my tenure as Clerk of the House. The events at the beginning of the 118th Congress brought an increased awareness by the American public of some of the Clerk's duties in supporting the operations of the House. What the public saw, however, is simply the tip of the iceberg in terms of what the Clerk's office does to support the House's daily legislative activities.

The Clerk's office, as you know, is a nonpartisan organization composed of 244 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff spread across nine offices, who provide a wide array of procedural assistance and support necessary for the orderly conduct of official business of the House, its Members, and Committees. I am very proud of Clerk staff skill, commitment, and dedication as they bring their talents to bear on behalf of the institution we all serve.

My goal throughout my tenure as Clerk has been to harmonize outstanding service with the responsible use of taxpayer dollars. In other words, I am committed to tying all spending to actual need. It gives me great pride to report that we have continued to strike that balance while tackling new challenges and addressing expanded responsibilities—the natural result of technological advancements and changes to the House's operations.

For example, during the Second Session of the 117th Congress, Clerk staff supported 628 hours of legislative floor activity, added 62,072 cosponsors to measures, recorded 539 Roll Call Votes, engrossed and enrolled 762 (38,676 pages) measures, covered 1,318 Committee reporting assignments (totaling 123,254 transcript pages), processed 128,951 financial and lobbying disclosure filings, and presented 85 online sessions of the mandatory Member Workplace Rights and Responsibilities training. All of this represents but a fraction of both the public-facing and behind-the-scenes responsibilities Clerk staff handle.

I would like to focus briefly on three major areas of the Office of the Clerk's operations and budget: modernization, maintenance, and behind-the-scenes expenditures.

MODERNIZATION

Critical to House operations is the modernization of our workflows, internal operations, and information and technology products.

Legislative Information Management System

While actively supporting the current Legislative Information Management System (LIMS), my Legislative Computer Systems division (LCS) continues the multi-year

project to redevelop and redesign it. Clerk staff use this mission-critical system to manage House legislative operations, record legislative information and activities, and transmit legislative data to institutional partners, including the Government Publishing Office (GPO) and the Library of Congress.

In 2023, LCS aims to release the Committee Action Reporting System (CARS) module used to track Committee actions and the Bill BRIEFS module for processing introduced bills and original and additional cosponsors.

The LIMS project is on track for completion in the second quarter of calendar year 2025.

Online Submission of Legislative Documents

Released House-wide on May 2, 2022, the improved eHopper (ehopper.house.gov) provides a web-based application for Member offices that guides staff through the electronic submission of select legislative documents rather than via emails with attachments. Built within the new LIMS infrastructure, the improved eHopper has streamlined the processing of Member submissions and improved the efficiency with which the Bill Clerks sort and filter individual and bulk submissions, process introduced bills, and submit them to GPO for publishing.

Comparative Print Suite

In October 2022, my office released House-wide the Comparative Print Suite (compare.house.gov), a set of tools that enables House staff to produce comparative prints showing how proposed legislation may amend existing law and how a bill, resolution, or amendment changes from one version to another. Currently, the product team is working on two new features: how an amendment changes a bill and an enhancement to bill-to-bill differences that allows for isolated comparisons of larger texts. We expect to release these features in the second quarter of this year.

Legislative Drafting and Standardized Formats for Legislative Documents

One of the first recommendations of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress was related to full adoption of the XML standard known as USLM—United States Legislative Markup. This standardization work is important and necessary for modernizing the lawmaking process as it will lead to, among other things, improved tools for collaboration. The Comparative Print Suite is available today thanks to this ongoing standardization work.

My office and the House Legislative Counsel have begun analysis related to current and new tools used for legislative drafting and collaboration. We will soon work on a project vision and a plan to tackle this very important initiative.

Lobbying Disclosure System

As I have testified in the past, the Lobbying Disclosure Electronic Filing System was deployed in 2006 and, while updates have been made over the years, the current system nevertheless permits duplicate lobbyist accounts, which is especially

problematic in light of the more than 35,000 active and inactive accounts the system currently manages. Given the system's age, my staff and I recommended that the system be redesigned and built anew. A contemporary system will improve user experience, provide more efficient processing, enable increased security, and provide strategies for maintaining a single account for a lobbyist regardless of job or name changes.

My staff in LCS continue to research similar systems in other jurisdictions in public and private sectors and evaluate technologies that we can leverage in a redesign effort.

Additionally, we continue to examine third-party solutions for identity management services, and, in particular, processing of personally identifiable information (PII) for unique lobbyist identification. We are also in discussion with our Senate counterparts to formulate a plan that seamlessly integrates with the Senate's Lobbyist Disclosure App.

MAINTENANCE

Part of the challenge of ensuring smooth and uninterrupted floor and Committee support comes down to the vitally important role of maintenance. I recognize that maintenance is a dry and relatively uninspired topic compared to the eHopper and Comparative Print Suite, but the easiest way to sum up the importance of investing in maintenance is this: I never want to tell the Speaker that Members cannot vote today because of a system outage. Maintenance and investment in redundancy may be less exciting than technological breakthroughs in voting systems, but, frankly, they are primary in my mind to keep the House Floor operational day in and day out. I would like to highlight two critical maintenance tasks.

Electronic Voting System

As the Committee is aware, the Electronic Voting System (EVS) is a mission-critical system, comprising components and subsystems that are designed for maximum reliability and security and as such require ongoing maintenance and timely upgrades. Clerk staff are currently preparing for a lifecycle replacement of the EVS display system at a cost of approximately \$1.4 million. This replacement will ensure the reliability of the display boards for another 10 years. Additionally, we will update the EVS servers and data connectivity infrastructure this fiscal year. This work complements our 2021 update of the display subsystem that feeds the display boards and our 2018 update of the custom vote stations.

Stenographic Machines

I have also brought a "show and tell" to support my discussion of the importance of maintenance and its attendant costs. This is a Luminex II Steno Machine that our Official Reporters use to record everything from the State of the Union Address and Committee hearings to House Floor activities. The initial investment is \$5,545 per machine, which includes a one-year service warranty, while the annual maintenance cost for our supply of 52 machines is approximately \$17,000, and annual license renewals are approximately \$39,000.

To be clear, these are necessary costs to ensure that our Official Reporters have the tools in proper condition to ensure the outstanding and timely service they provide to House Members and Committees. These machines do get a workout on a regular basis. For example, during the week of March 7 of this year, Official Reporters covered 72 Committee activities. To demonstrate the timeliness and efficiency of this group, the reporter for today's hearing will produce the transcript in 48 hours or less.

BEHIND-THE-SCENES EXPENDITURES

Finally, I want to address some of the expenditures Members may not easily recognize. A large portion of our mission are behind-the-scenes efforts, but those are held to the same high standard of efficiency and effectiveness as our more prominent responsibilities. Here are three examples:

- 1) One behind-the-scenes responsibility is the acquisition, maintenance, and storage of House documents and artifacts. The Office of the Clerk is responsible for the preservation and maintenance of the House Collection of art and artifacts as well as storage space at an annual cost of \$60,000 and mobile shelving units at an annual maintenance cost of approximately \$8,000. As with most things, we have seen an increase in these costs, even before we address the growth of the collection itself.
- 2) Another behind-the-scenes expenditure is the support the Office of the Clerk provides for ceremonial events. The Clerk's Office of Communications division is called upon to create invitations, tickets, and programs for statue unveilings, Christmas Tree lightings, Congressional Gold Medal ceremonies, and other events as well as signs accompanying condolence books following the passing of Members, legislative staff, and dignitaries.
- 3) As a final example of a behind-the-scenes expenditure, the Office of the Clerk, pursuant to House Rule II(2)(i), assumes the day-to-day management of a Member office in the event a Member, Delegate, or Resident Commissioner passes away, resigns, or is expelled. When an office becomes vacant, the Clerk becomes its employing and certifying authority and designated steward until a successor is elected. The Clerk works with the remaining staff to preserve the integrity of the office's nonpartisan operations. These duties require the full or part-time attention of more than a half-dozen Clerk staff, communication with state election officials, and close coordination with the Committee on House Administration and other House Officers. During the 117th Congress, the Office supported 22 vacant offices, compared to 13 in the previous Congress.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's ongoing support for the operations of the Office of the Clerk. For fiscal year 2024, we respectfully request \$44,747,000. The request is a net increase of \$3,920,000 (9.6%) above the fiscal year 2023 enacted funding level. Seventy-four percent (74%) (\$32,897,200) of the requested amount will support salaries, training, maintenance, warranties, and publications/reference materials to carry out our existing and new responsibilities. Specifically, personnel expenses and training of 244 FTE staff account for \$30,657,200 of the overall request.

Nearly \$7,000,000 of the request will fund technology and modernization projects as well as business continuity and disaster-recovery activities. This funding request supports procurement- and contractor-related costs for required maintenance of the EVS and the Comparative Print Suite, continued development of the eHopper, and other items. Additionally, the requested funds will continue to support the redevelopment and modernization of LIMS and the Member Information System (MIS).

The remaining sixteen percent (16%) of the overall request is for nonpersonnel-related expenses, equipment, software maintenance and warranties, nontechnology contractor support, and contracts, such as closed captioning, curation, exhibits, and stenographic reporting.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Espaillat, Subcommittee Members, I want to conclude by emphasizing that one of the many things I am grateful for is that the employees of the Office of the Clerk share my commitment to providing outstanding service while remaining respectful of the fact that we are operating with taxpayer dollars. That combination provides me with great comfort as I am constantly analyzing the efficiencies of my office's budget. We are all dedicated to making efficient and effective use of the funds allocated to our efforts in serving this great institution. Thank you again for your continued support and for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.