Testimony concerning modernization recommendations that build legitimacy for Congress and strengthen its constitutional duties by Lorelei Kelly, Public Good Group, for the House Legislative Branch Subcommittee, Committee on Appropriations FY 2027. Hearing date: March 17,2026

Dear Chairman Valadao, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Lorelei Kelly. I am a Principal at Public Good Group, where I work on democratic innovation, focusing on how governing institutions can incorporate civic knowledge, community listening, and participatory input into policymaking. For a decade, I led the congressional modernization portfolio at Georgetown University.

Appropriations Priorities for Congressional Modernization

To support the continued modernization of Congress, I respectfully recommend the following areas where appropriations decisions can make a meaningful difference.

First, continue and increase funding for the **Congressional Modernization Account to $10 million** so that the House can scale successful technology pilots and support innovation across committees and member offices. For example, an e-hopper- like process for committees to make submissions to the House.

Second, please fund $**10 million more** to strengthen the Clerk's office so that it can build state of the art **legislative branch data infrastructure**, including investments that support structured legislative data, data inventories, and interoperability standards across congressional agencies. Support for data governance initiatives will help ensure that Congress maintains trusted public information systems. This is critical in an

increasingly weaponized commercial eco system that is largely built on advertising platforms. One simple example is better coordination i.e. project and product lists from both the House and Senate to help oversight committees, appropriators and officers be in alignment.

I also humbly request and additional $**10 million for the House Digital Service**–the multi tasking technology team that is bringing the world's most powerful legislature into the 21st century.

I request 10 million in support for Congress' institutional memory– committee staff. Please **i**nclude specific language that allocates funding for **committee pilot programs that test structured civic listening and public input systems** and that implement modernization recommendations. Modest investments in platforms that allow committees to solicit public evidence, analyze constituent input, and integrate civic knowledge into hearings and oversight could significantly strengthen Congress' connection to the American people.

Lastly, I advocate that you begin exploring the development of **public-interest artificial intelligence tools for Congress**. Carefully designed AI systems trained exclusively on congressional information could help Members and staff navigate complex policy information while preserving institutional independence and data security.

Today Congress faces a dual challenge: rebuilding institutional legitimacy while strengthening its ability to govern in an increasingly complex and uncertain information environment. Strategic modernization investments can help address both challenges simultaneously.

Importantly, much of the groundwork for these reforms has already been laid by Congress itself. The Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress produced a landmark set of bipartisan recommendations designed to strengthen the institution. The ongoing work of the Modernization Subcommittee of the Committee on House Administration continues this progress.

The opportunity now is to ensure that appropriations decisions support the implementation of these recommendations. With sustained investment, Congress can strengthen its deliberative capacity, modernize its data infrastructure, and create new systems that connect Americans' knowledge and experience to the policymaking process.

Strengthening the Institutional Capacity of Congress

Modernization efforts aim to strengthen Congress' ability to deliberate, legislate, and oversee effectively. Reforms that improve committee collaboration and professional staff capacity help focus hearings on substantive policy issues and support evidence-based policymaking.

Committees remain the knowledge centers of Congress. Strengthening their capacity strengthens the institution as a whole.

Modernizing Technology and Data Infrastructure

Congress must continue modernizing its technology and data systems. As artificial intelligence becomes integrated into policymaking workflows, congressional information systems must remain secure, resilient, and capable of supporting modern legislative work.

Structured legislative data and improved technology procurement are helping Congress adopt tools designed for legislative needs. Continued investment in data standards and interoperability will improve coordination across committees and agencies.

The First Branch is a distributed knowledge network already. It contains the memory of American democracy. Now it must become the world's premier trustworthy digital repository and legislative information infrastructure.

Integrating Civic Voice

Congress also faces the challenge of reconnecting citizens with their representative institution. Integrating civic voice into policymaking can strengthen the constitutional principles of assembly and petition while addressing declining public trust.

What remains underdeveloped is **legislative listening infrastructure**—systems that help Congress gather and organize public input in ways that inform policymaking.

Legislative Listening and AI

Field hearings already demonstrate how legislative procedures can incorporate public participation. Emerging technologies can expand this capacity by helping committees analyze large volumes of constituent input and identify common concerns.

At the same time, Congress should explore public-interest artificial intelligence trained on authoritative legislative sources such as bills, hearings, CRS reports, and committee transcripts. Such tools could help Members and staff navigate complex policy environments while preserving Congress' independence from commercial data platforms.

Thank you for inviting me to submit testimony. I am available for followup and am glad to support your efforts to make the US Congress an exemplary governance leader and a trustworthy information provider.