

**Statement of Congressman Bennie Thompson
before the
Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress**

**Tuesday, March 12, 2019
9:30 a.m.**

- Thank you for inviting me to testify before your committee today, to share my input on creating new rules and policies to help modernize the legislative branch.

- Last Congress, I introduced legislation entitled the *“No Couches for Congress Act”*.

- This bill amended the Rules of the House of Representatives to:
 - (1) prohibit Members of the House from using congressional offices or official House resources for personal overnight accommodations,

- (2) require the House Committee on Ethics to respond to complaints filed by Members of the House and
 - (3) the bill also amended the Internal Revenue Code to allow Members of the House a deduction of up to \$3,000 for living expenses with an adjustment for inflation after 2018.
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- The bill was introduced as a result of two unanswered complaint letters from 31 Members of Congress, including myself, that were sent to the House Ethics Committee questioning the legality and propriety of a significant number of Members choosing to use their Congressional offices as overnight lodging facilities.
 - According to a 2013 Huffington Post Article, as many as 33 Members of Congress lived in their offices in 2011, despite drawing an annual salary of \$174,000.

- This practice has persisted, as evidenced by almost 30 Members of Congress that have admitted to sleeping in their offices just last year.
- The Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington filed a complaint in 2011 with the Office of Congressional Ethics requesting an investigation into the conduct of House Members who slept in their offices.
- The investigation challenged the practice arguing that it was illegal and unethical because it constituted a misuse of official resources in violation of House Ethics Rules.

- Members who sleep overnight in their offices receive free lodging, free cable, free security, free cleaning service, and utilize other utilities free of charge in direct violation of the ethics rules which prohibit official resources from being used for personal purposes.
- It has been previously reported that Members who use their offices for lodging may be receiving free government benefits worth up to 10% of their salary.
- Continuing to maintain a personal residence in Congressional offices, using Congressional resources for personal use (such as water, phone, utilities, etc.) and increasing or interfering with the work of housekeeping and maintenance staff brings discredit to the House and blatantly violates House ethics rules.

- Furthermore, Members' maintaining a personal residence within House office buildings creates a hostile work environment for employees that work within the buildings.
- The actions of these Members raise several obvious and potential violations that reflect negatively upon the decorum and credibility of the House as a body and as an institution.
- This practice calls into question the ethical standards set by the House and should be investigated and evaluated.
- I ask that this Committee consider developing and implementing new rules and policies that will end the practice of Members sleeping in their offices to help promote a more efficient Congress.

- Thank you for your time and allowing me to share my input on this matter. I look forward your response.