



TESTIMONY

**CBO's Efforts to Enhance Its
Transparency, Effectiveness,
and Efficiency**

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Modernization of Congress
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Chair Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and Members of the Select Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the efforts of the Congressional Budget Office to enhance its transparency, effectiveness, and efficiency. Today I will highlight four key things.

*First, CBO is focused on continuously improving its responsiveness and transparency.*¹ Beginning in fiscal year 2019, the Congress increased our budget to bolster that process—for example, to expand staffing in high-demand areas, such as health care and immigration; to organize staff to work on broader, shared portfolios; and to publish more data and documentation about the methods the agency uses to analyze various topics.² We report to the Congress about the topics addressed in our transparency efforts and about other work in progress every three months.³ To give a few examples of forthcoming publications that will provide insight into how we do our work, we will soon release:

- A description of how CBO models effective tax rates on capital income,
- An examination of how consumers and businesses form expectations of inflation, and
- A technical description of a model the agency uses to estimate the likelihood that the unemployment rate will exceed various thresholds.

Making our work more accessible is another example of our recent efforts to continuously improve. We now publish all of our reports in a mobile-friendly format and have created interactive tools, slide decks, and visual summaries of reports. We have improved readers' access to cost estimates in particular: New, predictable URLs help readers locate the estimates more quickly on CBO's website; new filters allow readers to search for estimates by their associated legislation's 10-year total effects on direct spending, revenues, and deficits; each estimate's web page now includes a link to the associated bill's text and legislative information at Congress.gov; and the

estimates are presented in a way that makes it easier to find pertinent information.

Second, CBO is working to increase the diversity of its workforce. Attracting and retaining a diverse workforce are crucial parts of ensuring that we have the best possible staff and that our work benefits from different perspectives and experiences.⁴ In 2020, we created a diversity and inclusion working group. That group's mandate includes recommending ways to increase the representation of women, minorities, and people with disabilities in the agency's workforce and to ensure that all staff can successfully contribute to CBO's work and culture.

Third, CBO is increasing its access to data. We pull together information from many different federal agencies to do our work.⁵ We currently have in place more than three dozen data use agreements for protected information. Still, obtaining data from agencies can present challenges—such as the length of time it can take to receive the data. To meet that challenge, we are pursuing agreements that allow our analysts remote access to restricted data. Simultaneously, we continue to invest in certain physical security measures to protect access to that data. We have also enhanced our ability to assess and detect cyber threats and have implemented multifactor authentication—helping keep data secure.

Fourth, CBO continues to make organizational and operational changes in response to new developments. To illustrate how we might adapt to such developments in the future, I will give some examples of things we have already done. As legislation has grown more complex, we have spent more time providing preliminary analyses and technical assistance during the drafting stage. We have also prepared cost estimates more often than in the past for bills that are heading for votes without first being marked up by committees.⁶ A consequence of those changes is that our workload has grown considerably.

1. See Congressional Budget Office, *Transparency at CBO: Future Plans and a Review of 2020* (March 2021), www.cbo.gov/publication/57008.

2. See Congressional Budget Office, *The Congressional Budget Office's Request for Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2022* (February 2021), www.cbo.gov/publication/57265.

3. See Congressional Budget Office, *CBO's Recent Publications and Work in Progress as of July 2, 2021* (July 2021), www.cbo.gov/publication/57253.

4. See Congressional Budget Office, "Diversity and Inclusion" (accessed September 13, 2021), www.cbo.gov/about/careers/diversity-and-inclusion.

5. See Congressional Budget Office, *The Congressional Budget Office's Access to Data From Federal Agencies* (June 2021), www.cbo.gov/publication/57150.

6. To learn more, see Congressional Budget Office, *10 Things to Know About CBO* (January 2021), www.cbo.gov/about/10-things-to-know, and *An Introduction to the Congressional Budget Office* (January 2021), www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/Intro-to-CBO-2021.pdf (158 KB).

We strive to meet new demands while also fulfilling our statutory requirement to prepare cost estimates for bills approved by committees and other reports specified in law about the budget and economy.

To accommodate the Congress's changing agenda, we have developed new analytical capacity and reorganized staff. Over the past several years, the agency has improved its capability to study how legislative proposals would affect the economy and thus the budget as the Congress continues to be interested in such "dynamic analysis." More recently, we have strengthened our ability to analyze climate issues to better prepare for legislative proposals on that front. And as part of our efforts to anticipate future needs of the Congress, we realigned our organizational divisions in 2021 to better address three priority areas—health; income security; and climate, energy, and infrastructure—and we created a new unit in our Budget Analysis Division focused on education, housing, and finance.

Even as we plan for the Congress's future needs, we are aware that those needs may change in the face of unforeseen events. The 2020–2021 coronavirus pandemic, for example, posed challenges that required swift action. The agency quickly focused its resources on modeling the economic and budgetary effects of the pandemic—including establishing a cross-agency working group for that purpose. In addition, we published updates of our budget and economic projections more frequently to provide the Congress with timely information in the midst of rapidly changing circumstances.

To ensure that the pandemic would not impede our work for the Congress, we sped up our modernization efforts and asked our staff to innovate, quickly shifting

to a remote work environment. We streamlined some of our procedures, changing to an entirely paperless process for producing cost estimates, for example. We also moved our most intensive computing operations to the cloud—making them more efficient in the process—and increased our ability to access data remotely.

In conclusion, CBO remains committed to becoming even more transparent, effective, and efficient, and we will continue to innovate to best support the Congress.

This testimony was prepared by Leigh Angres, with contributions from many people at the Congressional Budget Office. In keeping with CBO's mandate to provide objective, impartial analysis, the testimony makes no recommendations.

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CBO continuously seeks feedback to make its work as useful as possible. Please send any comments to communications@cbo.gov.



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