

**STATEMENT BEFORE THE HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE
ON THE MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS: OFFICE OF
THE CLERK OPERATIONS AND PRIORITIES**

THE HONORABLE CHERYL L. JOHNSON

January 20, 2022

Chair Kilmer and Vice Chair Timmons, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting me to testify about the priorities and operations of the Office of the Clerk as well as the work related to the recommendations made by this Committee to make Congress more effective, efficient, and transparent on behalf of the American people. My staff and I are thankful for the opportunities we have had to discuss new ideas and recommendations adopted by the Committee.

From the introduction of bills on the House Floor to the delivery of enrolled bills to the White House for presentation to the President, our staff is integral to the legislative process. The Clerk's Office is a nonpartisan organization that provides procedural assistance and support necessary for the orderly conduct of official business of the House of Representatives, its Members, and Committees. Over time, the duties of the Office have expanded to include disseminating organizational information, preserving the history of the House, and supporting technological advancement. The Office is composed of 227 full-time equivalent positions spread across nine offices.

My Office pursues numerous, diverse goals and priorities. My staff and I routinely seek ways to improve our work and welcome the opportunity to be a trusted partner of this Committee. I specifically wish to recognize the efforts of my staff, who have unique jobs supporting legislative activities and House operations. Their skill, commitment, and energy are critical to the maintenance and modernization of the work of this great institution. The success of many of the Committee's recommendations will rely on the skills, knowledge, and innovation of Clerk staff, and I wish to reaffirm my commitment to supporting them and providing a workplace that allows them to flourish.

ADOPTING STANDARDIZED FORMATS FOR LEGISLATIVE DOCUMENTS

One of the first recommendations that this Committee made related to the creation and implementation of standardized formats for legislative documents. More specifically, the recommendation was to fully adopt the standard called United States Legislative Markup (USLM). This XML format allows for a more modern production and exchange of our congressional legislative documents, including the U.S. Code and statutes. This work is a joint effort undertaken with our partners in the Senate, the Government Publishing Office (GPO), and the Library of Congress.

In October 2021, the Legislative Branch XML Working Group released version 2.0.10 of the USLM XML to the public on GPO's USLM GitHub Repository at github.com/usgpo/uslm/tree/proposed. The USLM GitHub repository also contains all prior versions, user guides, presentations, and sample files. The XML Working Group, which is

co-chaired by staff in my office and the Secretary of the Senate’s office, plans to move the USLM 2x schema out of beta in conjunction with the production launch of GPO’s XPub Program.

It is important to note that there is a cross-organizational set of systems that utilize the USLM schema, requiring a great level of coordination. Each project builds upon the tools and successes of previous projects. The XML Working Group, in consultation with the Bulk Data Task Force, continues to analyze and recommend next steps that build on the work that has already been accomplished. As with any data standardization efforts, interoperability is a key goal, and project work must address any potential impacts on those documents and systems currently in production.

This standardization work is important and necessary for modernizing the lawmaking process, as it will allow for the creation of a more coherent and collaborative system for Members and staff, a simpler drafting system, improved tools for collaboration, instant comparison of proposed bills to current law, and the automatic display of approved changes made by amendments to bills. This Committee’s support of this ongoing work is significant and valued.

Roadmap for Publishing Legislative Documents in USLM XML Format¹

Completed	U.S. Code
Completed	Enrolled bills, public laws, and the Statutes at Large
Completed	HOLC/SOLC statute compilations
IN PROGRESS <i>Initiated</i>	Remaining bill/resolution versions (introduced, reported, engrossed, all amendments, et. al.)
C	Committee Reports
D	House portions of the <i>Congressional Record</i> , including the <i>Daily Digest</i>
E	Hearing record
F	House Calendar
G	<i>Precedents of the U.S. House of Representatives</i>
H	<i>House Journal</i>

¹For more information about this roadmap, please see page four of the initial report at <https://cha.house.gov/sites/democrats.cha.house.gov/files/documents/Adopting%20Standardized%20Formats%20for%20Legislative%20Documents.pdf>.

More details about the USLM standard and the projects mentioned are available in the reports submitted to the Committee on House Administration (CHA) as required by House Resolution 756 of the 116th Congress. Most of the reports are publicly available online at CHA's website (cha.house.gov).

TRACKING OF AMENDMENTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON CURRENT LAW

The comparative print project team, led by my staff in the Legislative Computer Systems (LCS) division, and in partnership with the Office of the Legislative Counsel and our vendor partners, continues to develop features and prepare for a wider deployment. The Comparative Print Project is a suite of applications that allows House staff and others to create on-demand, point-in-time comparative prints between legislative texts and between legislative text and the law. Specifically, the Comparative Print System displays how a bill might change current law, how two versions of a legislative proposal differ, and how an amendment proposes to change a bill. Understanding these changes is critical to making decisions on pending legislation. Accurately displaying these differences in text (in print or online) is key to helping users understand proposed changes and potential impacts.

Comparative results are shown in two ways: an online, dynamic, interactive report and a PDF that can be printed or downloaded. Users access these results through a key feature, the Toolbox View.

As part of our pilot program, more than 160 House Committee staff have access to the Comparative Print System. In the last quarter, a small group of staff from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and the Congressional Research Service at the Library of Congress joined the pilot group. Their collective feedback about the system's usability, desirability, learnability, and accuracy continues to be positive and helpful.

The project team is working on several operational tasks related to House-wide deployment, including moving the application to a cloud environment. My staff is working with our cloud vendor and our internal partners in the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to ensure a stable and secure cloud infrastructure. When complete, this infrastructure will pave the way for more robust, accelerated deliveries of products, features, and change requests.

The project team has been working with the CAO's Congressional Staff Academy to develop on-demand and instructor-led courses. Some system features, such as Changes to Existing Law and the Inbox, will be made available to users only after they receive required training. Other features, such as Bill Viewer and Bill-to-Bill Differences, which are simpler and more straightforward to use, will be made available to all House staff without training.

We are looking forward to releasing the Comparative Print System House-wide upon completing migration to the cloud and the required security audits. Our goal is to deploy the suite of applications in the first quarter of 2022.

More details about the Comparative Print System are available in the reports submitted to CHA as required by House Resolution 756 of the 116th Congress. Most of the reports are publicly available online at CHA's website.

COMMITTEE VOTE DATABASE AND SCHEDULING TOOL

My staff continue to research technical solutions to address the Committee's recommendations for establishing and maintaining a database of votes taken in Committee. As the recommendation acknowledges, individual votes and vote results are available online in at least four locations and on most Committee websites, but they are not yet available in a central online location or in machine-readable formats or searchable in ways that the legislative community and the public expect. This recommendation will allow for great accessibility and transparency in Member voting records. This project is a key opportunity for us to assist Committees in the creation, dissemination, and maintenance of voting records.

Currently, my staff are analyzing the potential scope of such a project. We want to build a solution that is based on human-centered design (HCD) principles and provides a central location to record, process, and share the voting data entered and verified by Committee staff in other places, such as the U.S. House of Representatives Committee Repository (docs.house.gov/committee) and other required publications. Furthermore, we know that across the Committees, there are several disparate systems and applications in use. Careful consideration needs to be made regarding what system designs and implementation strategies could work in each Committee's current (or near future) workflow and processes without causing unintended disruption. Project planning, development, and deployment of any tools cannot be done without input and buy-in from Committees.

To assist in our analysis of this work, my staff and I are currently working on releasing a request for information (RFI) for the purposes of gathering information and investigating possible solutions from industry, academia, other legislative bodies, civil society organizations, and advocates. I expect that the RFI will be released later this month.

A second recommendation that relates to Committees was to create a common Committee tool that will assist in the scheduling of Committee meetings and activities at times that do not conflict with other meetings and activities of Committees on which their Members serve. We all know that scheduling is no easy task in Congress. As with the database for Committee votes, my staff is also analyzing the potential scope of this project and intends to release an

RFI to investigate possible solutions and gather information from industry, academia, other legislative bodies, civil society organizations, and advocates. I expect that the RFI will be released later this month as well.

Both of these Committee topics are discussed in the reports submitted to CHA as required by House Resolution 756 of the 116th Congress. Most of the reports are publicly available online at CHA's website.

LOBBYIST IDENTIFIERS, REGISTRATION, AND DISCLOSURE

The current electronic filing system for lobbying disclosure was initiated at the request of CHA in 2003 and deployed into full production in 2006. Since then, updates have been made to maintain the system, but it remains largely the same today. It generates an individual account ID for each lobbyist; however, the current system relies on a less-than-fool-proof method to determine whether that lobbyist already exists in the system. While my staff have implemented various processes and procedures to reduce duplicate lobbyist accounts, managing 35,000 lobbyist accounts (20,000 active and 15,000 inactive) means that a few lobbyists will inevitably have multiple IDs over time.

Given the system's age, we recommend that it be redesigned and built anew. A contemporary system will improve the user experience, provide more efficient processing and automation, and allow for greater transparency. Redesigning the system will be no small undertaking, nor will deciding the strategies for maintaining a single account for a lobbyist regardless of job or name changes. There are more discussions to be had with this Committee, CHA, the Committee on Appropriations, and the Senate on the scope and desired outcomes of such a project.

To assist in our analysis of this potential future project, we continue to do research on similar systems in other jurisdictions (both public and private sectors), and we are evaluating technologies that can be leveraged in a redesign effort.

More details on this topic are discussed in the reports submitted to CHA as required by House Resolution 756 of the 116th Congress. Most of the reports are publicly available online at CHA's website.

ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF COMMITTEE REPORTS

Adopted at the start of the 117th Congress, Section 2(1) of H. Res. 8 (the House Rules package) continued to permit Committees to electronically submit reported measures, legislative and nonlegislative reports, and related material electronically, a practice that

began in the 116th Congress. This Rules change also fulfilled a recommendation made by this Committee.

My staff in LCS continue to maintain the secure email solution while the Tally Clerks in Legislative Operations receive and process the submissions. GPO publishes the reports online and produces printed copies. The benefit to Members and staff is an easier submission process that maintains the House's protective staffing posture. No longer do staff need to push a hand truck full of paper from one of the House Office Buildings to the U.S. Capitol. This change in process was welcomed and, so far, has had no negative impact.

ELECTRONIC COSPONSORSHIP MANAGEMENT

The Committee has recommended that Members be allowed to manage their cosponsorship of bills electronically. The current email-based eHopper system does allow Members Sponsors to submit cosponsors. The eHopper system has become the House's primary way of bill introduction and cosponsor submission. This system provides a convenient avenue for Members or their staff to submit documents electronically for processing. There was a House Rules change to allow Members to demand their name be removed as opposed to requesting unanimous consent for their name to be removed. This Rule change does not allow Members to remove their name electronically.

Currently, my staff is working to deliver an improved eHopper experience for Members, their staff, and our Legislative Operations staff. This solution will improve the user experience for Members and their staff and ensure that each submission meets the requirements for processing. Improving the quality of each submission will assist the Bill Clerks in the quality and timeliness of their work. This updated solution will also meet the needs of the Bill Clerks as they process an increasing number of bills submitted for introduction while leveraging the existing email solution for backend processing.

My staff and I are planning to deliver an initial production release in the first quarter of 2022. Additionally, we are working with the CAO's Congressional Staff Academy to develop on-demand training that would be made available at the time of release.

CONGRESSIONAL DATA TASK FORCE

One of the first hearings held by this Committee was about the work of the House's Bulk Data Task Force. The Task Force is a partnership of representatives from the various legislative branch organizations from the House, Senate, Library of Congress, GPO, and CBO. Dedicated staff from these organizations work in a cooperative manner to coordinate and accomplish openness and transparency goals and make legislative information easily

accessible, accurate, timely, free, reusable, and available in standard, machine-readable formats.

As the Committee's recommendation to change the name of the Task Force to the Congressional Data Task Force states, this ongoing collaboration has been positive for our office, other legislative branch organizations, legislative stakeholders, and data transparency groups, ultimately leading to technological advances in how legislative data are made public. My staff and I fully support the name change. The proposed name change accurately captures the current work and mission of the Bulk Data Task Force.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

I would also like to lend my support for other recommendations that this Committee has made, specifically the recommendations about improving staff recruitment, diversity, retention, compensation and benefits, and accessibility.

My staff has a wide range of skills: some are very specialized, including many that are unique to the operations of the House, and others, such as the IT staff in LCS, have skills that are highly sought after and highly compensated in the private sector. Having a central strategy to help the House Officers and officials recruit a qualified, diverse workforce is crucial and requires significant effort. It takes time and effort to encourage individuals to enter public service, so, where we can work together, I am in full support. We all have a shared story and experience of what it means to be a public servant in the U.S. House. Telling that shared story to increase the number of applicants we have for our open positions has value.

Improving accessibility, not only online but with our physical structures, is important. Members, staff, and the public have visible and hidden mobility impairments. Aside from providing an improved environment for all Members, staff, and visitors to the House, this will support staff diversity hiring goals by making it easier for staff with impairments to support this institution. I fully support recommendations for improving accessibility.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak before the Committee.