

Office of the
Chief Administrative Officer
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-6860

September 9, 2022

The Honorable Derek Kilmer
Chair
Select Committee on the Modernization of
Congress
226 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable William Timmons
Vice-Chair
Select Committee on the Modernization of
Congress
226 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair and Vice-Chair:

Attached is the CAO's submission to the committee as our written statement for the hearing on Wednesday, September 14th. Please let me know if you have any concerns or questions regarding the statement. I look forward to speaking with the Committee and am excited to share the CAO's plans on the future of modernization.

Sincerely,



Catherine L. Szpindor
Chief Administrative Officer

**Statement of
The Honorable Catherine L. Szpindor
Chief Administrative Officer
United States House of Representatives Before the
House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress**



September 14, 2022

Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chair Timmons, and Members of the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, thank you for this opportunity today and the many opportunities we've had previously to meet for the good of the institution. Since 2019, the Select Committee has provided a needed focus on ways to make the House more efficient, effective, and transparent. We thank you for trusting the staff of the Chief Administrative Officer to be a partner in making lasting positive changes so that Congress can run more effectively and efficiently.

I recently received a note from a veteran Chief of Staff that speaks to the partnership and effectiveness of our work in the CAO along with the Select Committee on Modernization. The Chief wrote: "I have been incredibly impressed with the work and transformation of the CAO over the last few years. In the past, I felt that a lot of CAO departments seemed to view staff and offices as something to manage and to deal with - now I feel a strong sense of partnership and collaboration. There is a real effort to ask, understand and dig deep to see what services Members, offices, and staff need and then to provide those services. This has been even more important as we went through the pandemic and the aftermath of Jan. 6th. Whether it is improved food and drink offerings or help with Human Resources, CAO has become the partner and support we need."

The CAO is grateful to the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress for partnering with us, as we look forward, it is our plan to continue the work needed to meet the evolving needs of Members and staff.

Our Mission to Modernize

The mission of the nearly 800 CAO staffers is actually very simple, it is to make it easier for Members and staff to do their jobs as they serve the American people. We call that "Member Focused. Service Driven."

Our teams have worked collaboratively with the Modernization Committee to streamline and improve products and services. Internally, our varied and highly skilled staff work as "One CAO" to perform our services so you, the Members of Congress, can focus on your Constitutional duties.

Even as we celebrate our project implementations this year, we do so with an eye towards the future. We know there is more work to do. Since January 2022, we've launched and improved many new projects and programs to fix pain points, help modernize House operations and assist the House community.

Helping the House Workforce CAO Coach

We have listened to the Modernization Committee and so many others who have expressed the need for more relevant and efficient training for House staff. The CAO Coach program, in collaboration with the Congressional Staff Academy and Customer Advocates, allows us to connect with staff on a personal level.

We train staff on the practical skills they need and can't learn anywhere else. We can also educate offices about CAO services. We leverage these relationships to listen and learn about offices evolving need and how the CAO needs to modernize to be more effective. The CAO Coach Program has received many positive comments and are expanding our

services with two new Coaches dedicated to supporting legislative staff.

The CAO Coaches and Customer Advocates launched the first ever bipartisan orientation program for new staff in February. The full-day program runs weekly and is quickly becoming a standard part of so many office's onboarding processes.

The same team developed the 2022 District Office Conference Program, providing specialty training to meet the needs of over 800 district office staff by position. The staff conferences have been so successful that we plan on developing similar training for every Member staff position in the next year. These trainings bring staff together, provide opportunities to share best practices and connect everyone with the CAO services they need at each level.

- *"I was so pumped after coming back from the Field Rep Conference, but now feel like I need more direction. Now that I chatted with you, I feel excited and with a plan of action! This has been so so helpful. Thank you!"*

More than 2,300 staff have visited a newly revamped CAO Coach website that features job-specific programming and resources, on-demand videos and staff role tutorials, best practice documents, templates and more. In total, CAO Coach hosted in-person and virtual courses attended by over 2,600 House staffers and provided one-on-one consultations to hundreds of staff in Washington, D.C., and the districts.

Employee Assistance and Well-Being

We recognize that a strong and effective workforce is made up of skilled staffers who can effectively manage their work-life balance. The bipartisan support for the expansion of services offered by the Office of Employee Assistance and the House Center for Well-being is meeting the needs of thousands of staffers.

The added emphasis on counseling and well-being has proven to be valuable for staff dealing with the pandemic and the trauma from January 6th. Even as the urgency of these events pass, staff continue to utilize these services as they have become mainstream.

Innovating Our Services

My Expenses

The new cloud-based travel and expense reimbursement tool, "My Expenses" is helping Members and staff more easily pay official expenses and request reimbursement. The tool gives staff more control by allowing them to enter their own expenses and permits tracking of the process through the system. Gone are the days of shuffling paper, losing receipts, scanning forms, and wondering where payment is.

Staff are pleased and forthcoming in their appreciation:

- *"In my 20 years of Hill finance experience, I have to say that the ease and quickness of this system is by far the best I have encountered. -Member Office Financial Manager*
- *"I'm having to file less paper since everything is now electronic filing. Staff really seem to like it for processing their reimbursements." -Member Office Financial Manager*

Human Resources Hub

We heard and understood the call from the Select Committee for a centralized HR program for Member offices. The House Human Resources Hub is quickly becoming an essential resource for managing office operations. Staff are downloading and offices are implementing best practice resources for their offices. This helps create common office standards and added efficiency to those employing offices.

House Resume Bank

The updated House Resume Bank is providing offices an easier and quicker way to find job candidates as well as a better experience for candidates. Thousands of job seekers created profiles and submitted resumes within weeks of the site's launch earlier this year. And it's proven effective. Employees have submitted their resumes through the Bank and have been hired at all levels – including senior positions. Effective use of the Resume Bank has led to requests from Chiefs of Staff about more effective recruiting methods to attract diverse and talented applicants.

Improving Technology

House Digital Service

The House Digital Service team was announced in January to identify, develop, and incubate products and services that solve the unique technology challenges faced in Member and Committee offices.

The team's makeup models that of a tech start-up by employing agile development practices to accelerate the delivery of new services to the House community. Recent additions of a Product Manager, User Experience Designer, and Software Engineer are filling the roles needed to move forward.

Currently, House Digital Service is researching Member and Committee office needs, including improvements to constituent services, legislative tools, and office operational functions. Specific examples include, leave tracking software for Member offices, options for a Legislative Branch-wide staff directory, and a common committee calendar portal to help reduce schedule conflicts – a recommendation of the Select Committee.

House Digital Service is committed to “build with and not build for” stakeholders to ensure products meet customer criteria.

Quill

The Quill digital signing platform, originally developed by the Senate, serves as an essential tool for the House community and has eliminated the time-consuming need for staff and interns to walk door-to-door to capture Member signatures on group support letters. Nearly every Member of Congress is enrolled to sign letters and over 300 offices have used the system to author or lead a letter. The system reached a new peak of usage during the FY2023 Appropriations cycle with more than 2,000 new letters created. This collaboration with the Senate serves as a model for future opportunities, when appropriate, to share code, lessons learned and best practices to more efficiently modernize both Chambers.

Robotic Process Automation (RPA)

Our expert technical teams established the Robotic Process Automation Program to automate manual and time-intensive tasks. The team collaborated across multiple CAO business units to deploy automations throughout the first six months of 2022.

Examples include a software “bot” that can read and record tax IDs off W-9 forms for the Office of Finance so that vendor payments are reported properly, and a bot that can read, log, and file District Office Leases for the Office of Administrative Counsel. Previously, both examples required that CAO staff manually open the files, read them, and record the information in the systems of record.

As we mature our approach to RPA, Digital Services will provide support to Member and Committee offices to help them automate some of their common repetitive tasks.

Payroll Modernization & System Replacement

Later this decade, the House on premise human resource and payroll system will near its end of life. The CAO has begun conducting market research on replacement options and costs estimates to share with the Committee on House Administration and the Legislative Branch Subcommittee.

Replacement of the House payroll system will require a substantial investment by the House. This will be the most significant project the CAO has undertaken since the deployment of the House’s financial system in 2009. Through this project we will modernize antiquated processes, automate manual procedures, and improve the payroll experience for both Members and staff. This project also presents an opportunity for the House to consider transitioning to a more frequent pay cycle for House employees – a recommendation of the Select Committee.

Payroll and Benefits: Office of Finance eForms Application

The Office of Finance is deploying an e-forms application that employs electronic signatures to automate many of our administrative forms. The new system provides Member, Committee, and Leadership offices the ability to electronically prepare, approve, route, and submit payroll transactions. These transactions are validated in real-time against House rules and regulations, providing considerable time savings to the office.

The new system:

- Replaces current time-intensive payroll transactions which must be prepared manually before they are approved with an authorized signature.
- Improves security as only authorized Payroll and Benefits points of contact can prepare or approve payroll forms or approve transactions.
- Reduces paper stock and costs for Employing Offices.
- Improves Business Continuity by eliminating paper processes
- The new platform is scheduled to launch this month with additional modules and functionality implemented after the 118th Congressional Transition.

HouseNet Modernization

The CAO is in the early stages of a project to completely revamp HouseNet, the House Intranet. The plan includes moving HouseNet from an on-premises hosting platform to a cloud-based platform designed from the ground up for organization intranets and includes interconnections with many of our existing software tools. The goal of the project is to make HouseNet the hub for all CAO services so Members can easily find, learn about and request the administrative services they require.

Transition to the 118th Congress and Beyond

The Congressional Transition is always a busy time, but it is also an exciting time. Chairman Kilmer and Vice Chair Timmons when you were Freshman, you came to this institution with new ideas based on your past experiences as a business consultant and a

small business owner. You also came with a desire to help Congress work more efficiently.

Every transition brings new Members. New staff. New Expectations. And if the House doesn't continuously modernize, both new Members and existing Members will become frustrated, and the effectiveness of the institution will be greatly diminished. As we look to the 118th Congress and beyond, it is our intention to continue the work of the Select Committee and build the modernization function into the governance and planning of the CAO.

The CAO's Member Focused, Service Driven promise is in many ways a commitment to modernization. It is a commitment to remain relentlessly focused on Members and evolving our services to meet their needs. To keep that promise, the CAO has adopted a new strategic plan that focuses on better understanding Member, Committee, and Leadership offices, continuously improving our services, and effectively prioritizing our projects.

You have already seen some of these efforts. We've ramped up our communication and outreach efforts and are reaping the benefits of increased surveying, Customer Advocate office visits, CAO Coach training, tours of our facilities, and targeted newsletters. Our use of focus groups and pilot programs helps ensure we are listening, learning, and implementing correctly. Our new Digital Services Team is building relationships across the House and learning where they can bring the best value to address long standing Member pain points.

Furthermore, we have begun an investment process that prioritizes our projects that best improve services to Members and the broader House. Through this prioritization process – we hope to invest in important modernization projects that we know bring high value to Members and we are confident we are ready to execute successfully. To think of this another way, the CAO has started to operationalize the modernization function that the Select Committee has pioneered – at least that part that is within the CAO's jurisdiction.

Finally, the new Modernization Account the Select Committee championed provides a significant opportunity for the House to maintain momentum. Modernization requires continued targeted funding and investments in the institution. Working closely with the Legislative Branch Subcommittee, the Committee on House Administration, and the other House officers, I recommend the House develop a transparent process to prioritize modernization projects funded through this account. I look forward to future discussions with my fellow Officers on the best way to implement such a process that our oversight Committee can be confident in.

Conclusion

Chairman Kilmer and Vice Chairman Timmons, the modernization momentum you created propels us forward and our path is clear. The CAO has integrated modernization into our core outreach, prioritization, and investment planning functions. And the broader House is well positioned to continue your charge into the next Congress and beyond.

I am grateful for the support of your Committee, the great working relationship we have with your staff, and look forward to responding to any questions you may have.

Thank you