

June 21, 2021

The Honorable Catherine Szpindor
Chief Administrative Officer
U.S. House of Representatives
632 Ford House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: In support of congressional staff benefits study

Dear Chief Administrative Officer Szpindor:

We, the undersigned, strongly urge your office to conduct a study on the current benefits available for House staff, as outlined in [a letter](#) sent earlier this month by Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, House Democratic Caucus Chair Hakeem Jeffries, and Committee on House Administration Chair Zoe Lofgren.

A capable, experienced, and representative staff is critical to Members' capability to fulfill their constitutional obligations and meet the needs of their constituents. Congressional staff, both on Capitol Hill and in district offices, are crucial to the daily operations of the institution. They craft policy, advance legislation, and interact daily with constituents.

Over the last 30 years, the responsibilities assumed by congressional staff have grown alongside a 30% increase in the American population and a 700% jump in federal spending. Despite these trends and the wide range of responsibilities facing them, however, House staff receive lower pay and less robust benefits compared to executive branch and private sector employees.

Insufficient compensation drives congressional staff to get their "Hill ticket" punched and head to K Street. As a 2019 analysis from your office showed, the average House staffer has only been in their position for 2.5 years. This figure drops to a mere 1.3 years for the legislative assistants who advise Members on key subject-matter areas.¹ Further, 65% of staffers say that they plan to leave Congress within five years.² When staff leave, they take valuable institutional knowledge with them, causing Congress to turn to lobbyists for this expertise.

By offering lesser compensation, Congress also damages its ability to attract a diverse workforce. With unpaid internships and underpaid entry-level positions, the pipeline of talent to Capitol Hill is dramatically limited by a candidate's ability to self-fund their first roles in Congress. This dynamic impacts diversity across Congress. In 2018, people of color accounted for 38% of the

¹ Chief Administrative Officer. (2019). House of Representatives Compensation and Diversity Study Report: Member, Committee, and Leadership Offices. *U.S. House of Representatives*.

https://www.house.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/2019_house_compdiversitystudy_finalreport_membcommlead.pdf

² See Furnas, A. and LaPira, T. (2020, September). Congressional Brain Drain. New America.

<https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/reports/congressional-brain-drain/>

U.S. population, but only 13.7% of all top House staff, according to the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.³

In order for Congress to uphold its responsibilities to the American people, the institution must be able to attract and retain a capable and diverse workforce. This is why we support the request of House leadership and echo the call for your office to conduct a study on the current benefits available. Understanding the full scope of benefits available to House staff will provide a clear picture of the current gaps in staff compensation and give the House an opportunity to address these gaps in a meaningful, evidence-based manner.

In their letter, House leadership provided a robust list of topics they hope this study will cover. Building on those recommendations, we urge you to examine the ways in which the mental health services available to House staff compare to those offered in the U.S. Senate, executive branch, and private sector. In the wake of the January 6th assault on the U.S. Capitol, many staff are still grappling [with lasting trauma](#). Any analysis of benefits available to House staff should recognize this reality and seek to identify ways in which the House can create a healthy workplace environment for its staff.

Thank you for the administrative, operational, and technical support that the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) provides to congressional staff. A study of House staff benefits will align with and strengthen this mission, ensuring that Congress is able to meet the challenges facing American communities and provide the kind of leadership the American people deserve. Recognizing the importance of the CAO's mission and the financial realities under which it conducts this work, we would encourage House leadership to ensure that costs for this study, including outside contracts, not be taken from CAO's core appropriation.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this further. Please contact Meredith McGehee, executive director for Issue One at mmcgehee@issueone.org.

Sincerely,
Bipartisan Policy Center Action
College to Congress
Congressional Management Foundation
Demand Progress
Democracy Fund Voice
Issue One
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies
NALEO Educational Fund
Pay Our Interns
Project On Government Oversight
Protect Democracy
Unite America

Courtney Robinson, Former House Committee Staff*

³ Brenson, L. (2018, August). Racial Diversity Among Top U.S. House Staff. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, <https://jointcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/House-Staff-Diversity-Executive-Summary-9-11-18-220-pm.pdf>

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