



Instituting a Liveable Pay Floor for Congressional Staff

Appropriations Committee: Legislative Branch

Agency: House of Representatives

Account: Salaries, Officers, and Employees

Type of Request: Report language

Background

A growing body of evidence has demonstrated that congressional staff are widely and consistently undercompensated for their work, especially in entry-level positions. Congress must work to ensure that all staff are paid a fair and livable wage.

In January, Issue One analysis of congressional payroll data found that 70% of D.C.-based staff assistants make less than a living wage – defined by MIT as \$42,610 for an individual with no dependents – as do 1 in 8 staffers overall. At the same time, a Congressional Progressive Staff Association survey of more than 500 staff found that 47% are struggling to pay bills and 39% have taken out loans to cover everyday living expenses. This dynamic is hurting Congress' ability to attract a representative workforce and keep experienced staffers on the Hill.

A living wage is a floor, not an ideal salary. According to MIT, a living wage is best understood as a "minimum subsistence wage," i.e., the amount needed to meet one's basic needs. It doesn't include key expenses like owning a car or saving for retirement. And yet, far too many congressional staff salaries don't even meet this baseline.

Pay increases for top-level staff are well-earned and good for constituents, but policy aimed at boosting staff pay and retention must keep in mind that the majority of Congress' workforce and legislative capacity comes from junior staff – 60% of staffers are under the age of 35 and 45% of staffers in 2020 made less than \$60,000. The average House staffer hasn't received a raise in over 14 months, according to a recent survey by the House Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

The idea of a pay floor is one that already has the support of House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, who said of the recent increases to the members' representational allowances, "What we've done is try to make us an employer that pays people a living wage in an expensive city, so they can afford to get housing....I'm for having a minimum."

Instituting better pay for junior staff isn't just fair for these employees; it's also the best move for constituents. Americans have every right to expect a government that is not only able to perform its job, but perform it well. In order to meet this expectation, Congress must invest in itself and its staff – starting with junior staffers.



Report Language:

Pay Floor Report: The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) is requested, within 90 days, to provide a report to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, the Committee on House Administration, and the Senate Rules Committee concerning the feasibility of instituting a pay floor for all full-time House and Senate staff – excluding fellows, detailees, interns, and contractors – that covers the basic needs and costs of living in the city where the staffer works. The Committee on House Administration will make the report publicly available online. In that report, the CAO is requested to evaluate the legislative mechanisms, costs, options, and other procedural reforms necessary to institute a Congress-wide pay floor, and is directed to consult with internal congressional stakeholders and outside experts as necessary to inform its report.