

**Public Witness Testimony on Boosting Congressional Capacity to Senate Appropriations
Legislative Branch Subcommittee for FY25**

POPVOX Foundation Director of Government Innovation [Aubrey Wilson](#) and Director of Government Capacity [Taylor J. Swift](#) submitted joint testimony this week to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch for Fiscal Year 2025 requesting the subcommittee's consideration of three initiatives to improve Congressional capacity in the House, namely the:

- Study on the Scope and Feasibility of a Senate Intern Resource Office,
- Formation of Congressional Data Management Plan, and
- Creation of a Bicameral Memorandum of Understanding for Co-Development of Legislative Branch Technology

Informed by their years serving in the House as former Congressional staff, they wrote in favor of these initiatives to support the Senate's workforce continuity and operational health, and thanked the subcommittee for offering the public the opportunity to provide testimony.

**Testimony Related to a Study on a Senate Intern Resource Office, the Formation of a
Congressional Data Management Plan, and the Creation of a Bicameral Memorandum of
Understanding for the Co-Development of Legislative Branch Technology**

**Submitted by Taylor J. Swift and Aubrey Wilson of POPVOX Foundation for the
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch Fiscal Year 2025**

Dear Chair Reed, Ranking Member Fischer, and Members of the Senate Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Our names are Taylor J. Swift and Aubrey Wilson, and we are both former Congressional staff who continue to support institutional modernization and operational innovation through our work at POPVOX Foundation. Although our backgrounds are from opposing sides of the political aisle, we submit this testimony jointly to humbly emphasize our support of the nonpartisan work this subcommittee champions to strengthen Congressional capacity. In particular, we submit three requests under the subcommittee's consideration:

- Study on the Scope and Feasibility of a Senate Intern Resource Office,
- Formation of Congressional Data Management Plan, and
- Creation of a Bicameral Memorandum of Understanding for Co-Development of Legislative Branch Technology

Study on the Scope and Feasibility of a Senate Intern Resource Office

We recommend that the Senate Sergeant at Arms study the scope, cost, and feasibility of creating a Senate Intern Resource Office to provide support services, such as training and professional development, to Congressional interns as well as act as a resource hub for Standing Committees, Leadership Offices, and Senate offices. Such an office should be strictly nonpartisan, work to aid all offices and interns who seek assistance, and act as a bridge to ensure that individuals are made aware of all the institutional support offices available to them should they become full-time Senate employees.

Congressional internships offer invaluable experiences for students, allowing them to gain first-hand knowledge of the legislative process, cultivate professional skills, expand their networks, and enhance their resumes in preparation for future careers. For many, Congressional internships often solidify commitments to pursuing a career in public service.

In addition to the benefits for interns, Congressional offices also reap significant advantages from hosting these aspiring professionals. Interns provide essential support to full-time staff by staying up-to-date on legislative and casework developments, assisting with constituent services and press outreach, conducting research, leading Capitol Hill tours, and coordinating press events. Furthermore, by taking on various administrative tasks, interns enable staff members to focus on other critical priorities, thereby increasing the overall productivity and efficiency of the office and the institution.

The Senate's strong tradition of offering internships throughout every office provides the predominant pipeline for individuals to get work experience, build a network, and find full-time employment within the Chamber. It's imperative that Senate offices retain individual agency to properly tailor internship experiences to their office, including final hiring and placement decisions. However, the intern experience can vary widely depending on the time of year and the office of placement. For example, individuals interning over the summer are often part of a larger group, resulting in more competition for limited projects or responsibilities. On the plus side, though, summer interns are able to attend the Summer Intern Lecture Series, which gives them the opportunity to learn first-hand from Senators, Representatives, and high ranking officials from across the Legislative branch. By comparison, interns who serve over a semester are usually only one of a handful in their office and thus are given more opportunities and exposure to a greater level of tasks, but have limited access to intern-specific programming.

A Senate Intern Resource Office could support both incoming interns and Congressional staff managing internship programs. By providing guidance and resources to those staffers who coordinate their office's internship program, this centralized office would empower staff to consistently create high-quality, engaging internship experiences across all offices, ensuring every intern has access to meaningful opportunities for learning and professional growth. Moreover, the absence of centralized recordkeeping and data collection on Congressional internships hinders the ability to assess the success of these programs. Without comprehensive metrics on the number of interns, paid opportunities, demographic characteristics, and the adequacy of compensation, it is challenging to determine whether internships are accessible and attractive to a broad range of talented individuals, especially those from less privileged backgrounds who may struggle with the high cost of living in Washington, DC.

A study on the feasibility and scope of establishing a Senate Intern Resource Office is a laudable step forward toward investing in the institution’s workforce and capacity.

Formation of a Congressional Data Management Plan

With the emergence of commercially available large language models (LLMs) and generative artificial intelligence, the Senate has acted proactively to establish user guidance and a staff working group, placing it among the world’s leading legislatures in responding to this emerging technology.¹ All Legislative branch entities play an essential role in the life cycle of legislative data — one that is institutionally important for the operations and transparency of our democracy, and in no way political or dependent upon party rule. However, a comprehensive data map wholistically examining the lifecycle of legislative data between the chambers and throughout the agencies that support them does not exist, nor does a comprehensive data management plan ensuring all entities manage data in a uniform, secure, and responsible approach.

The ongoing need for the Legislative branch to prioritize its data hygiene in alignment with government-wide best practices illustrates the timeliness of the Senate’s action to develop and adopt an institution-wide data management plan (DMP). This Senate-focused DMP will become an institutional, nonpartisan asset to ensure data interoperability between systems, accessibility by the public, and transparency. Additionally, coordination with the House and Congressional support agencies will build a foundation to allow for the creation of a Legislative branch-wide data map, leading to shared data standards, guidelines, and where appropriate, policies. Such coordination could be undertaken by a working group composed of the chief information officer, chief technology officer, or equivalent personnel within the Senate, House, Library of Congress, Government Publishing Office, Congressional Budget Office, and Government Accountability Office.

Data created, owned, or compiled by each individual Senator and his or her staff should remain within the authority of each Senator and not be considered “legislative data” within the DMP. Separate guidance should be provided to Senators regarding proper data management to ensure security and privacy protections.

Creation of a Bicameral Memorandum of Understanding for Co-Development of Legislative Branch Technology

Similar to efforts that should be undertaken to craft a Legislative branch DMP and data map, the Senate Sergeant at Arms, Secretary of the Senate, House CAO, and House Clerk, should develop a working group to explore the creation of a bicameral memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the two chambers to be able to work together — when appropriate — on co-development of bespoke tools that aid Congressional capacity, continuity, and customer service to the American people.²

¹ Harris, Marci, and Aubrey Wilson. “Representative Bodies in the AI Era: Insights for Legislatures.” *POPVOX Foundation*. January 2024, <https://www.popvox.org/ai-vol1>

² We recommend the working group be formed within thirty days of the issuance of the Legislative Branch Appropriation Subcommittee bill report and shall provide bimonthly reports to Appropriators, the House Committee

Modernizing Congressional operations to realize the benefits of modern technologies, best practices, and workflows is an ongoing activity requiring bipartisan attention and investment. Over the last decade, both the House of Representatives and the Senate have invested significant time and resources into the internal development of bespoke tools to modernize and streamline operations in response to both continuity challenges and Member demands.

Recent noteworthy examples of innovation and invention include the House Clerk's years-long development and launch of the Comparative Print Suite in October 2022, the Senate Sergeant at Arms' creation and continued refinement of the e-signature platform *Quill* in 2020, and both chambers' independent investment and development of next generation (but separate) lobbying disclosure portals. However, as these bespoke tools have been developed in one chamber or the other, access and utilization of the technology for the other chamber has been a continual challenge, requiring negotiation to expand access or pursue customization.

An MOU between the House and Senate would allow for greater strategic alignment of the two Chambers' IT investment and may foster greater coordination among the Chambers' guidance regarding technology authorization and utilization. From the perspective of a taxpayer, such an agreement would allow appropriations used to fund the development of a tool for Congressional use to benefit both Chambers, passing efficiencies onto constituents regardless of whether they seek support from their Senator or Representative.

The attention of this subcommittee to the needs of the Congressional workforce, the investment in modern technology, and the institution's agility in responding to emerging technologies is worthy of recognition. The creation of a Senate Intern Resource Office, a Senate data management plan, and an MOU to allow the utilization of technology across the chambers are echoes of a larger legacy this subcommittee is cementing. It is a legacy that will boost Congressional capacity and effectiveness for generations to come.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and stand ready to continue to support your work in the months ahead.

on Administration, the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, and to the public concerning the progress of the working group, including the creation of a pilot program.