

# ROADMAP FOR CASEWORK DATA

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# ISSUE BACKGROUND

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In 2021, after several years of [record-high demand](#) for Congressional constituent services, the House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress issued a recommendation (“[Recommendation 172](#)”) for the House to create “an optional system to allow offices to share anonymized constituent casework data and aggregate that information to identify trends and systemic issues to better serve constituents.”

The report explains:

*To provide data that is trackable and comparable, the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) should first develop a system of standardized casework categories and tracking standards – developed and refined in collaboration with caseworkers – and establish – House-wide unified analytics to identify casework trends and potential problem areas. Anonymized data could be collected and shared through an application programming interface (API) developed by the CAO. The CAO could then aggregate this data to produce a comprehensive dashboard or report that is made available to offices. The system should be optional and available on an opt-in basis for offices that wish to share and receive casework data. By aggregating data and utilizing unified analytics to identify casework trends and potential problem areas and making that information available to House offices and committees, the House could view a wider landscape of constituent concerns, better anticipate potential problem areas and backlogs, and identify issues that may need to be addressed through a policy change or other federal intervention.*

Following the release of the Select Committee’s final report, House Digital Services staff began gathering information and consulting experts to formulate recommendations for implementing Recommendation 172.

In March 2023, members of the Committee on House Administration Modernization Subcommittee [signaled](#) to the Chief Administrative Officer of the House of Representatives that the Select Committee recommendation was among its shortlist of high priority projects for implementation.

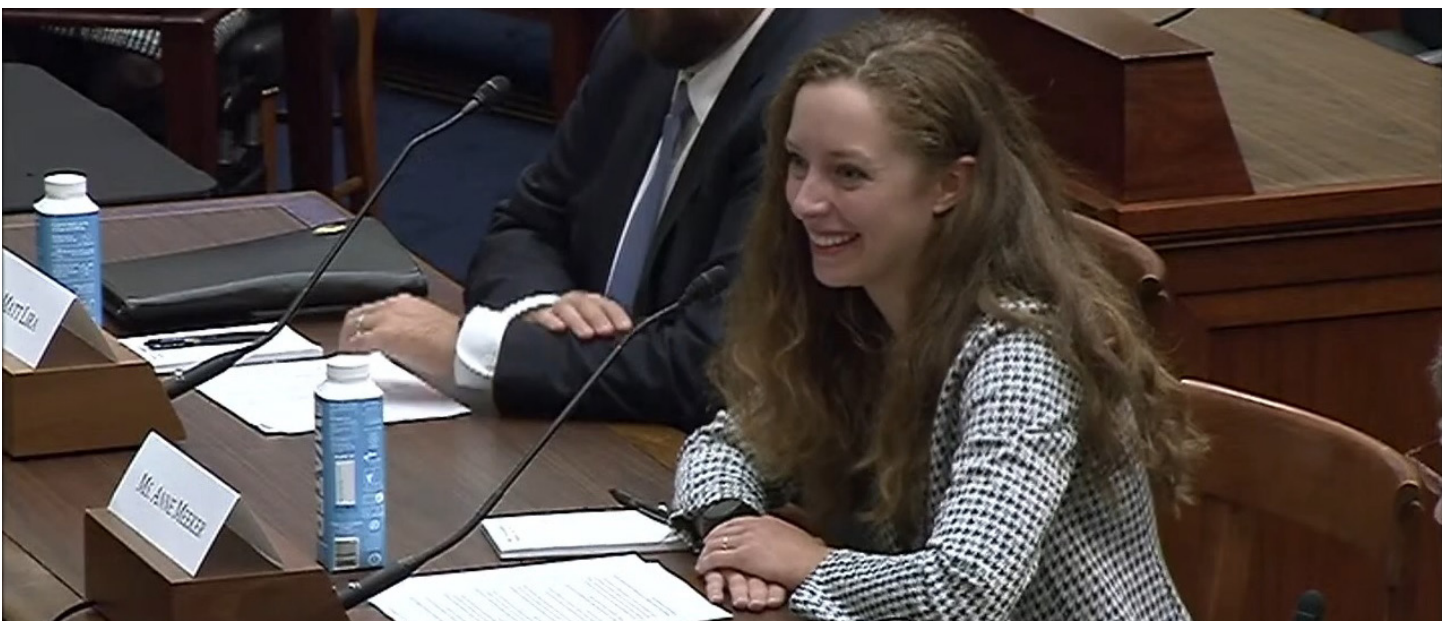
# POPVOX FOUNDATION WORK TO MODERNIZE CONGRESSIONAL CASEWORK

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POPVOX Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization founded in 2021 with a mission “to inform and empower people and make government work better for everyone.” The organization’s work falls into three categories: capacity, engagement, and innovation, with a primary focus on the U.S. Congress. Since its early days, POPVOX Foundation has worked to highlight the importance of Congressional casework and the opportunity that exists to unlock significant value for Congress, executive branch agencies and the American people as a whole from the data and insights that are collected in the course of casework.

## Testimony to the House Select Committee on Modernization

On July 14, 2022, POPVOX Foundation Deputy Director, Anne Meeker — a former director of constituent services and caseworker — testified in the House Select Committee on Modernization’s hearing on “Constituent Services: Building a More Customer-Friendly Congress.” In her testimony, Meeker stated that to “build a truly constituent-friendly Congress, the House and Senate must find ways to scale constituent services by taking a data-driven approach to learning from casework...” To this end, she recommended that the Chief Administrative Officer “require approved House technology vendors to **adopt a system of standardized casework categories and tracking standards**, developed and refined in collaboration with caseworkers, and **establish-House-wide unified analytics to identify casework trends and potential problem areas.**” Notably, Recommendation 172 hews closely to these suggestions.



*POPVOX Foundation Deputy Director Anne Meeker testifies in the House Select Committee on Modernization’s hearing on “Constituent Services: Building a More Customer-Friendly Congress.”*



Meeker went on to explain:

*Congressional offices receive rich information directly from those most impacted about how Americans actually interact with federal agencies—the “burdens, barriers, and inequities” they face in the course of claiming benefits they are entitled to by law. This data can be a valuable independent source of information to contribute to oversight plans, or suggest areas for legislative action. The problem is that this data is siloed between 541 offices.*

...

*To break that data out of its silos, the CAO should work with caseworkers to develop case tagging requirements that better capture the details of individual cases, and to require approved CRM vendors to incorporate the new requirements into existing systems. This could include additional demographic information captured in a Privacy Act Release Form, and circumstantial factors that may play into the case—for example, veteran status, risk of eviction or foreclosure, or relation to a national crisis like COVID-19.*

*After adoption of the standardized system, the CAO — possibly through the new House Digital Services, as suggested in a forthcoming [Lincoln Network report](#) — should develop an opt-in API (like the Connecting With Congress system) allowing individual offices to share anonymized case data to a central repository that would begin to allow the House to track casework trends. This could include dashboards created by the House Digital Services or reports by the Government Accountability Office drawing upon the data (Taxpayer Advocate Service reports to Congress are a great example). Eventually, committees of jurisdiction might even work with HDS to develop dashboards showing casework trends for the programs they oversee and incorporate aggregate casework data into committee work.*

## Casework Navigator Program Provides Resources and Forum for Information-sharing Among Congressional Caseworkers

In February 2023, POPVOX Foundation launched its Casework Navigator professional development series to help Congressional caseworkers build skills and connections through webinars, publications, a newsletter, and trainings. Through Casework Navigator programming, POPVOX Foundation staff remain in close contact with caseworkers, which provides unique insight into trending issues or technical challenges. Examples of this work include producing resources to support casework teams navigating the technical challenge of [redistricting](#) at the end of the 117th Congress and providing information for casework teams assisting constituents in [overseas crisis situations](#) in response to the Sudanese conflict.

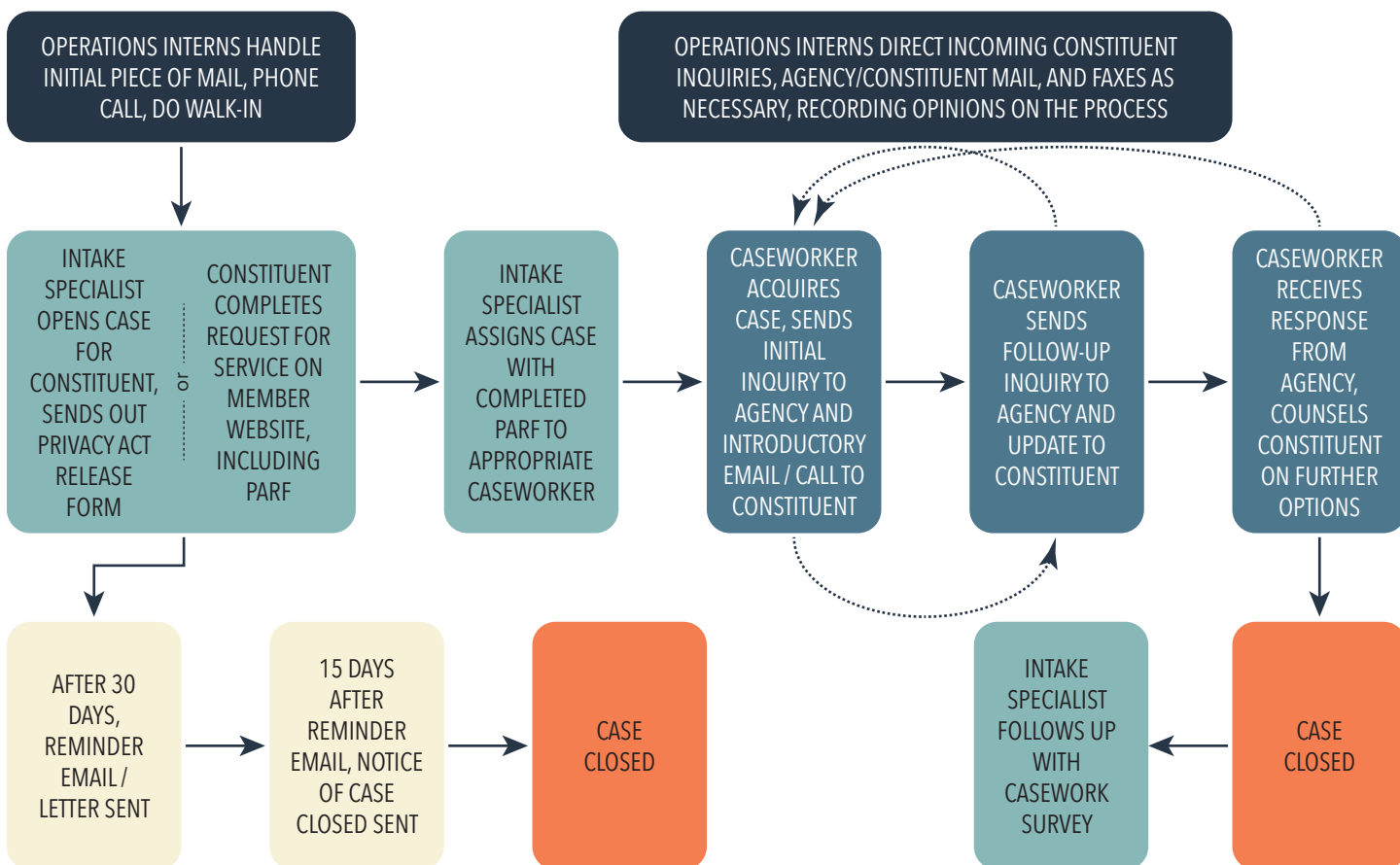
# GUIDANCE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATION 172

As noted, the Office of the CAO has indicated that it will move forward with the implementation of Recommendation 172, leveraging the House Digital Services and with the support of the Modernization Subcommittee of the Committee on House Administration. Given this movement, we offer the following recommendations, drawing upon the POPVOX Foundation team’s technical expertise, personal experience as caseworkers, and ongoing interactions with district staff through the Casework Navigator program.

In addition to technical recommendations, the guidance provides detailed background on casework operations to assist technical teams and committee staff who may not be as familiar with this area of Congressional office work.

## 1. Defining Congressional Casework

In its simplest form, casework occurs when Members of Congress and their staff work on behalf of constituents to resolve difficulties with federal agencies, in accordance with the law.



For example, a veteran might call their Member of Congress when—without explanation—they stop receiving disability benefits from the Veterans Administration (“VA”) for injuries sustained in combat. Professional casework staff in that office will talk with the constituent to understand the situation, get the constituent’s written permission to have the VA and other federal agencies release information to the Congressional office (using a Privacy Act Release Form, or PARF), and send a formal inquiry signed by the Member to the VA. Working with the VA liaison staff, the casework team will work to understand the cause of the benefit lapse and serve as a liaison between the veteran and the VA to make sure that any remaining steps to resolve it are completed.

While casework requests are complex, we may generalize that casework issues fall into three categories of problem: excessive administrative burden, inefficient processing, and “edge” or unusual cases where standard customer service channels fail.

Casework requests come from individuals, businesses, and government entities. Requests fielded by casework teams may involve federal and non-federal issues, but Congress’s constitutional authority to assist constituents seeking the redress of grievances<sup>1</sup> is generally understood to extend only to interactions with federal agencies.<sup>2</sup>

Members of Congress are prohibited by House and Senate Ethics guidance from exerting improper pressure on an agency to make a specific ruling. However, Members may request reconsideration based on the merits of the case, call attention to additional evidence, and request information and status reports on a case.

For purposes of the Casework Data Aggregator project, we suggest defining casework as:

**“an actionable request from a constituent for intervention with a federal agency, where the constituent returns a Privacy Act Release Form (‘PARF’).”**

This definition addresses the question of “what” casework is: (1) a request for intervention (2) with a federal agency; and “when” an inquiry actually becomes a case: (3) where the constituent returns a Privacy Act Release Form, providing detailed information on the nature of their difficulty with a federal agency.

This definition will be important for drawing distinctions on what is or is not included in the data set for the Aggregator project.

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1 [U.S. Constitution Article 1](#)

2 [Casework in Congressional Offices: Frequently Asked Questions](#)

## 2. Identifying the “Customers” for Congressional Casework Data

In order to design a Casework Data Aggregator with maximum utility for the House of Representatives, it will be important to identify the “customers” to be served by the the project and their needs:

### Committee and personal office legislative staff

One of the primary benefits anticipated with the Casework Data Aggregator is for Members and legislative staff responsible for overseeing federal agencies and programs to glean insights about these programs from the actual experiences constituents regularly report to Congress via casework.

For example, data about cases concerning veterans benefits will be especially helpful for the House Committee on Veterans Affairs (“HCVA”) — not just for the committee staff that are experts in VA programs, but also for the committee liaisons on the personal office staff of HCVA members. These are the legislative assistants that staff these members by drafting questions for hearing witnesses, suggesting letters of inquiry that can be written to agency leadership, and drafting amendments or bills.

Even for offices of Members who do not serve directly on HCVA, each House office has at least one legislative assistant with veterans issues in their portfolio. These staffers advise the Member on policy questions related to veterans issues, draft or oversee the drafting of statements or letters on the topic, and make recommendations related to cosponsorship requests or votes on the topic.

In addition to the staff of committees of jurisdiction, committee liaisons, and legislative assistants with the relevant topics in their portfolios, the Casework Data Aggregator should prove especially helpful to the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability and the House Committee on Appropriations.

Through its Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal Workforce, House Oversight is the committee charged with overseeing federal agencies as a whole, with:

*legislative and oversight jurisdiction over the federal civil service, including compensation, classification, and benefits; federal property disposal; public information and records, including the Freedom of Information Act, the National Archives and Records Administration, and the Presidential Records Act; government reorganizations and **operations, including transparency, performance, grants management, and accounting measures generally**; and the relationship between the federal government to the states and municipalities, including unfunded mandates.*<sup>3</sup>

One important way for Oversight to oversee agency operations and assess performance will be through the data available in the Casework Data Aggregator, demonstrating the number of cases pending by agency and program, and other key metrics providing visibility into agency customer experience.

For the Committee on Appropriations and the subcommittees that appropriate funding for federal agencies, the Casework Data Aggregator should provide a new data point for assessing how effectively recent investments are being implemented and serving as an early warning signal for areas where investment may be needed. This data can serve as a leading indicator of underlying problems before they become widespread, to verify agencies' self-evaluations of their performance improvement measures, and to contextualize agency budget requests.

In order to address the needs of all of these parties, the Casework Data Aggregator should ensure that casework data can be filtered by agency, program, issue, and facility. The usability of this data for legislative and committee staff could be further improved with observations from caseworkers with context and insight on what is causing particular trends.

It will likely be helpful for casework data to be sortable by committee jurisdiction, and updated in as close to real-time as possible, with the ability to compare demand against a historic baseline. It may also be helpful to provide the ability for staff to monitor regional trends to assist in more localized oversight (for example, to glean insights into issues common at regional or local Veterans medical facilities, or how benefits are processed in the wake of a natural disaster).

## New offices

Currently, there is [very little information available](#) on the distribution and demand for casework services across the country. No public, private, or internal dataset is currently capable of providing accurate numbers for:

- number of cases per office
- number of caseworkers per office
- case durations / time to resolution

These numbers vary significantly across Congressional districts but caseworkers and their managers have no way to know how their caseload compares with other offices.

Insights from casework data will be helpful for new offices — especially if the data can show baseline constituent demand by issue area or geographic region or for their states and districts. This would allow teams to make informed decisions on allocating and training casework staff. The ability to observe cyclical patterns of casework or regional patterns of casework needs after natural disasters will also help teams plan for long-term sustainable casework operations.



## Casework teams and district staff

Casework teams are almost exclusively sited in district offices. The typical casework team consists of between one and five staff, depending on the demands of the Member’s district and the office’s prioritization of constituent services. Caseworkers are responsible for working with constituents to determine whether a request is appropriate for casework; preparing inquiries for federal agency liaisons to request assistance on behalf of constituents; and serving as liaisons between agencies and constituents to work toward resolutions within the law. Caseworkers may be either specialists, focusing on a small number of agencies for the entire district, or generalists, working every case that comes their way by location or a staffing rotation. Incidental to these duties, caseworkers also develop strong networks of local stakeholders like legal service providers, immigration service providers, homeless shelters, veterans service officers, and others who may also be rich sources of information on “pain points” for federal agencies.

National casework data will be useful to casework teams as context for local casework service demand. New and existing offices may also be able to compare local constituent demand against national averages, identifying whether their constituents’ concerns represent real trends indicative of problems that require legislative solutions, or more localized issues that can be addressed with public education, outreach, and oversight.

Granular local data collected before the anonymizing process of the aggregator may also help teams evaluate areas for possible improvement: for example, a team that notices that its demand for assistance among veterans or recent immigrant communities is lower than expected may invest more heavily in outreach to those communities.

## House (and Senate) support offices:

Aggregated casework data may be useful to internal support offices —like the CAO Coach program or the Congressional Research Service — to allow experts to predict and target specific resources to support caseworkers when they are most valuable. Data on issue trends, periodization, and average demand and staffing will all likely be useful.

### 3. Challenges to Gathering Casework Data

Several technical, cultural, and procedural barriers must be overcome for the development and deployment of the Casework Data Aggregator with sufficient participation to serve the potential customers described above.

#### Multiple systems for tracking data across CMS vendors

Each of the Constituent Management System (“CMS”) vendors for Congressional offices (Leidos’ IQ, FiscalNote’s Fireside 21, and Indigov’s titular platform) has a different architecture for casework that makes tracking data between CMS systems difficult.

For example, cases in IQ can be reopened if the original issue re-emerges or if the constituent or agency provides additional information. In Indigov, teams can add follow-up cases, but cannot reopen cases once they’re closed. This would mean that the same case may show up as one case for an office using IQ, but two cases for an office using Indigov. At scale, this may affect the reliability of data between offices using these two systems. Similarly, the ability to merge or delete cases opened by accident or duplication is also different between platforms, and may contribute to challenges in creating an accurate dataset.

Default setup options across CMS platforms also tend to guide how offices structure their casework data management, which is often geared toward efficient casework team management rather than detailed casework data collection. CMS platforms come pre-loaded with the ability to capture the overarching agency or agencies the case involves, as this is often the primary factor that determines how offices will assign cases to caseworkers (for example, Social Security, or VA). However, they do not often come with additional levels of granular detail (for example, Social Security/Social Security Numbers, or Social Security/SSDI). Some offices choose to develop these systems to track more granular case information, and others do not.

Even within the same CMS, different features may lead to different practices between offices for tracking data: for example, in IQ, one office may request that IQ create multiple User-Defined Fields (UDFs) for data, where others prefer to create their own system of “tags.” In IQ, offices can create their own tags to capture demographic and other related information; in Indigov, offices can request that additional “affiliations” be created to capture the same information.

Offices, vendors, and CAO teams see this challenge of interoperable data every Congress in the transfers between outgoing and incoming Members (or in the last transition, between offices whose borders changed in redistricting). For many transitions, although the main points of a case may come through (constituent, contact information), details captured in these additional features (tags, affiliations, UDFs) is often lost.

## Variable definitions and practices between offices

Offices often have different rules and practices for defining casework, which may exacerbate the challenge of interoperability. For example, all House CMS platforms allow casework “cases,” “services” or “tickets” to be created from a mail record. For some offices, there is an explicit or implicit custom that simple casework, including referrals to non-federal resources, is not worth creating an entirely separate case; for these offices, the record of a response in the mail record is sufficient for internal record-keeping; however, the “case” may not be captured in a report intended to track casework.

These variable practices are particularly evident when offices release end-of-year or end-of-Congress reports: for example, some offices choose to only count services that became formal casework, where the constituent returned a Privacy Act release form and the office submitted an inquiry on the constituent’s behalf. However, others will choose to count every constituent inquiry routed to the casework team, including non-federal referrals and cases closed when the constituent did not return a Privacy Act form. In a competitive political environment, pressure is exerted on offices to count cases (and related metrics like money returned) as broadly as possible to demonstrate their impact, but this broad accounting may create additional noise in a national dataset.

## Considerations of constituent data and privacy

While House rules dictate that constituent information provided to Members of Congress in casework is considered the Member’s personal property, there are nonetheless considerations around safeguarding constituent privacy that will impact the development of a national aggregator. Especially for constituent casework involving sensitive topics like immigration status, LGBTQ identity, or other issues, Members may want to exercise significant caution or flag certain cases to not be shared with the Aggregator, to ensure that their constituents are not “outed” by the inclusion of identifying information in a national dataset.

## 4. Elements of a Successful Casework Data Aggregator System

A mature system that is useful to all parties and sustainable over the long term should include the following elements:

### Granular data (as far as reasonable)

To be effective for legislative and committee staff, casework data must be granular enough to reliably pinpoint the underlying problem the case addresses. Casework data that includes only the agency categories set up by default in most CRM platforms does not provide sufficient detail to be useful for targeted oversight.

To be useful to legislative and committee staff (as well as caseworkers and regional delegations), casework data must have a minimum level of detail to identify and locate potential problems. While this level of detail will be specific to each agency, in general we recommend the following:

**Agency:** The cabinet-level or independent agency most directly involved in the case. The aggregator must have the ability to recognize multiple agencies per case. Most CMS platforms already gather this information.

For example, Social Security, VA, IRS, USCIS, etc.

**Program/Benefit:** Agency benefit, program, or other higher-level category to locate the case. This category may also include appeals.

For example, SSI, SSDI, VA Health Care, VA Vocational Rehabilitation, VA Compensation and Pension, IRS EITC, FEMA Burial Reimbursement, etc.

**Problem:** Brief descriptive category for the cause of the constituent's problem. Some problems may apply to multiple agencies or programs (like overpayments), and others will be specific to the agency involved (like difficulties with Social Security's wage reporting app).

For example: Overpayment, SSI/SSDI - financial eligibility

**Case Status:** Status of the case as it came in through the casework team's intake process. This category may also include appeals.

For example: SSA Administrative Law Judge Review, Waiver Request, Pending Army Board of Correction of Military Records

**Offices Involved:** Many systemic casework problems stem from difficulties at specific processing locations. In some cases, this information can be assigned automatically from constituent-provided information like zip code, country, or Social Security Number.



For example: SSA Lakewood Field Office, SSA Program Service Center 1, Bedford VA Medical Center, US Consulate General - Ho Chi Minh City

**Case Circumstances:** Additional details on the case or the constituent's life circumstances are helpful to track trends. These may reflect details that impact the agency's processing, methods a constituent has already attempted to use to resolve the problem, or other circumstances surrounding a case.

For example: Dire Need (imminent eviction, foreclosure, inability to pay for food or medical care), DV, MST, Health Emergency, Veteran, Related to COVID-19 Pandemic, Related to Afghanistan Withdrawal, Natural Disaster, Referral to State Resources, etc.

### Minimally burdensome/maximally beneficial for caseworkers

While many caseworkers and casework managers are excited about the potential for a data aggregator to provide more responsive insights for team management and legislation, caseworkers' concerns around the project focus on the potential addition of time and administrative burdens to overstretched teams without a corresponding benefit to teams' ability to provide excellent casework services.

While many caseworkers are familiar with using limited casework data (for example, in generating statistics for year-end and end-of-Congress reports, or responding to one-off requests for information from legislative colleagues), data report generation systems in current CMS platforms are often clunky and time-consuming, leading to a natural hesitancy around instituting new systems of data management. Tools that require 1) extensive retraining, 2) time-consuming manual data entry, or 3) intensive quality control or administrative burden for casework managers will not be able to achieve the level of uptake or consistency required for the project's success.

A Data Aggregator system must minimize the burden on casework teams while demonstrating clear value to caseworkers for the burdens it imposes. Ideally, the Data Aggregator will have custom dashboards specifically geared toward caseworkers and casework managers showing how their caseloads compare against national averages, and historical statistics for their states, districts, and regions.

### Responsive to changing conditions

While some elements of casework are fairly consistent, casework is a dynamic practice that responds rapidly to changing conditions. The major casework agencies regularly introduce new programs, new appeal actions, and other case features that must be tracked to provide a complete picture of agency performance.

To help monitor these conditions, the Casework Data Aggregator must build in mechanisms to introduce new case categories and features or retire ones that are no longer necessary, and keep caseworkers informed on how to use them.

# 5. Recommendations for Phases & Timeline to Development

Given the constraints and elements required for a successful data aggregator system, we suggest that developing and launching the data aggregator tool should be a phased project focused on, sequentially, 1) a minimum viable product to demonstrate the tool's potential; 2) a human-centered design process to flesh out the tool's user interface and features according to the needs of its users, and 3) ongoing maintenance to ensure the tool's responsiveness and build stewardship for the long term.

## Phase 1: Demonstrate potential with a beta dashboard

An initial Minimum Viable Product that seeks to solely aggregate existing data (including broad agency category and time to completion) from CMS vendors into a beta dashboard. We anticipate that this phase could be achieved within three months after securing commitments from existing CMS vendors.

## Phase 2: Human-centered design process to develop functionality

After developing a minimum viable product to demonstrate the aggregator's system's utility to legislative and committee staff and casework teams, the CAO would be well-positioned to embark on a more intensive user research and design process to expand the tool's functionality.

This should include the development of standards for data collected by the aggregator, in partnership with caseworkers, legislative staff, committee staff, and CMS vendors. The level of granularity achieved in this system should be decided in partnership with both the staff expected to use the data and those tasked with generating it. This initiative should also consult data scientists and security experts to ensure that constituent anonymity is protected. It should also include further refinement of beta dashboards to tailor analytics to the needs of staff in districts and in DC.

We anticipate that this phase would take between six months and one year to complete.

## Phase 3: Develop supportive infrastructure for the tool's long-term success

With an increasingly functional product and buy-in from potential users, the CAO should develop sustainable mechanisms to support the product and its ecosystem. These may include:

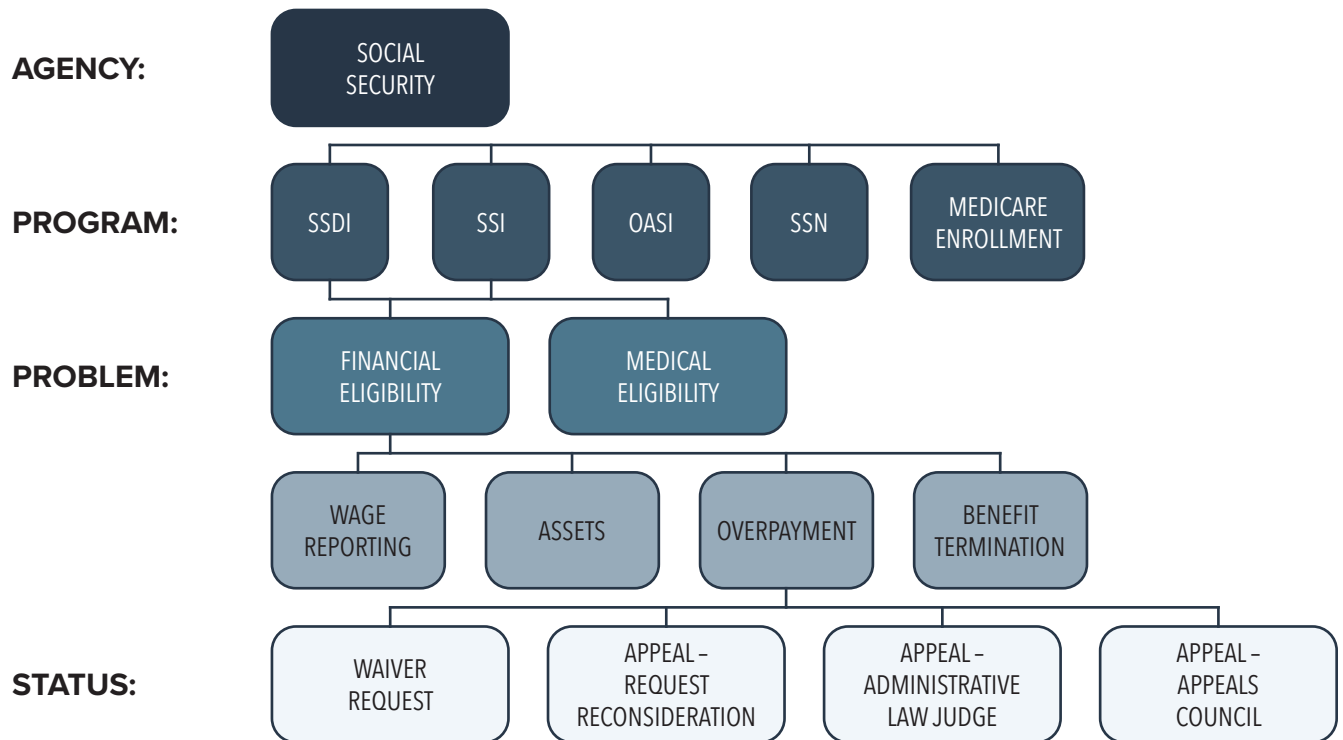
- Outreach and education to caseworkers around new casework data standards, including enhancing training for best practices around casework data management into new caseworker onboarding and existing on-demand resources for caseworkers.
- Update the House Digital Privacy Act Form to capture some casework data directly from constituents. To avoid making this form overly burdensome, the CAO may consider integrating conditional logic into the Privacy Act Release Form to guide constituents toward providing as much information as they can reliably be expected to understand.

- Support vendors in incorporating emerging technologies to minimize manual data entry. For example, an AI data management tool integrated into existing CMS platforms could recognize key words entered into case notes or descriptions, or common forms uploaded in the casework process.
- Establish mechanisms for caseworkers, legislative staff, and agency liaisons to suggest new case attributes or tags or retire outdated ones. This must also include a mechanism to 1) require CMS vendors to integrate new tags, and 2) alert caseworkers of the new tags and the case information they are intended to capture.
- Establish a regular forum for caseworkers, legislative staff, and agency liaisons to share insights, updates, and requests for additional functionality for the casework data aggregator. Topics to be covered may include technical updates and questions on the Aggregator, as well as more substantive discussions of the issues caseworkers are seeing emerge through casework. This responsibility could in theory be part of the purview of an internal support office dedicated to casework, similar to the Office of the Whistleblower Ombuds, the Office of Talent and Development, and the forthcoming House Intern Resource Office.

We anticipate that this phase would be ongoing and responsive to users' needs.

# APPENDIX: SAMPLE DATA STRUCTURES & TAG MAPS

- [Sample caseworker-facing conditional data entry interface](#)
- [Sample Privacy Act Release Form](#) with conditional logic to collect case data
- Sample Social Security data structure:



- CASE CIRCUMSTANCES:**
- Dire Need (imminent eviction, foreclosure, inability to pay for food or medical care)
  - DV
  - Health Emergency
  - Veteran
  - Related to COVID-19 Pandemic