

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 28, 2021

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tim Ryan
Chairman
House Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
H-307, the Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Chairman Ryan:

The staff who serve on Capitol Hill have endured a difficult past several years, which have included helping Members deal with the challenges of a financial crash and the Great Recession, hyper-partisanship and legislative deadlock, the winding down of two wars, the longest government shutdown in our history, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the violent attack on the Capitol on January 6. It is no surprise that Members and Committees are finding it harder and harder to recruit and retain talented Americans to serve as Congressional staff. The January 6 insurrection, in particular, has weighed heavily on current staff who may be contemplating a departure to seek job opportunities elsewhere. We believe that we must accompany our efforts to make the Capitol complex safer with a parallel effort to make staff pay more competitive with the private sector. A failure to do so would be detrimental to Congress's ability to carry out its work and deliver for the American people.

As your Committee and Subcommittee move ahead with appropriations for the legislative branch for Fiscal Year 2022, we urge you to include a 20% increase in funding for MRAs, for committees, and for leadership offices so we can increase staff pay. In 2011, before the Budget Control Act's spending caps and sequestration took hold, the Congressional Budget Office's ten-year budget outlook projected House salaries and expenses to rise to \$1.867 billion in Fiscal Year 2021 to accommodate inflation. The actual amount appropriated for this year, however, was only \$1.481 billion – a cut of \$386 million, or 20.7%. The increase we seek would simply return funding for House salaries and expenses to the 2011 inflation-adjusted baseline.

Many have been serving as Congressional staff for years out of a deep sense of duty, choosing not to pursue or accept competitive offers from the private sector in order to remain in public service. Their commendable sacrifices and contributions ought to be met with the raises and benefit increases they have surely earned through their hard work and dedication. Raising office budgets would also make it possible to recruit talented new staff eager to serve their country but deterred by the barrier of current salaries and less competitive benefits.

According to a September 2020 report issued by New America, “the House did not increase spending on personal offices’ budgets between 2013 and 2017, but inflation decreased the value of those dollars by roughly 10% over the same time frame.”¹ As a result, the House’s professional workforce has

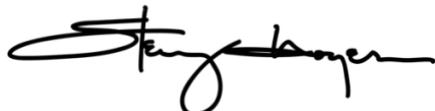
¹Alexander Furnas and Timothy LaPira, “Congressional Brain Drain,” New America, September 2020; <https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/reports/congressional-brain-drain>, accessed 2/16/2021.

effectively seen a reduction in pay during a period when the cost of living in the Washington metro area has been rising steadily. The median rent for a one-bedroom apartment in the District of Columbia in 2019 reached \$1,817 per month.² Moreover, the median home sale price surpassed \$1 million in November 2020,³ leaving local homeownership out of reach for many House staffers and their families. The median salary in 2019 for a Legislative Assistant in the House was \$55,306, according to the Congressional Research Service, and the median salary for a Press Secretary was just \$58,280.⁴ However, those salaries are 20% and 8% below, respectively, their 2010 levels when accounting for inflation. Median salaries for Legislative Directors and Chiefs of Staff were similarly lower when inflation is factored in: 14% and 10% respectively. It is no wonder that, according to the same New America study mentioned above, “the declining purchasing power of a Capitol Hill paycheck compels staff to leave the Hill after an average of three years.”⁵

In our experience, House staff generally prefer working in public service and would remain on Capitol Hill longer if they no longer felt that their only option to afford the cost of living in the Washington metro area and achieve economic security in the middle class is to leave and pursue more lucrative positions in the private sector or the executive branch. At the same time, while we take steps to recruit and retain a more diverse workforce, those coming from economically underprivileged backgrounds find it hard to afford internships and entry-level positions on Capitol Hill without family support. This often has the effect of advantaging those from high-wealth families. Pre-existing wealth should not be a barrier to entry for a career as a Congressional staffer.

We hope you will consider this request to raise MRA, committee, and leadership office budgets for next year. We thank you as well for your ongoing efforts to ensure that the legislative branch is best able to serve the American people.

Sincerely,



STENY H. HOYER
House Majority Leader



HAKEEM JEFFRIES
Chair, House Democratic Caucus

² Yesim Sayin Taylor, “Appraising the District’s rentals – Rental housing affordability,” D.C. Policy Center, April 2020; <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/appraising-the-districts-rentals-chapter-iii>, accessed 2/16/2021.

³ Jeff Clabough, “Median price of single-family home in DC tops \$1M for first time,” WTOP News, November 11, 2020; <https://wtop.com/business-finance/2020/11/median-price-of-a-single-family-home-in-the-district-tops-1m-for-first-time>, accessed 2/16/2021.

⁴ R. Eric Petersen, “Staff Pay Levels for Select Positions in House Member Offices, 2001-2019,” Congressional Research Service, September 11, 2020.

⁵ Furnas and LaPira.