

Statement of Chere Rexroat, Acting Architect & Chief Engineer
Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request, Architect of the Capitol
Legislative Branch Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
March 28, 2023



Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Espallat, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 budget for the Architect of the Capitol (AOC). We are committed to working closely with you, your staff, and the Committee on House Administration (CHA) to ensure the AOC meets the needs and expectations of the House community.

We are truly grateful for the agency's hard-working, mission-focused employees who get the job done every day in order to support the functions of Congress, the Supreme Court and the Library of Congress (Library).

I joined the AOC in 2018 serving as the Deputy Chief Engineer and became the Chief Engineer in July 2022. The Office of the Chief Engineer's (OCE) mission is to provide consolidated services across the AOC for safe and efficient project delivery including maintenance of critical infrastructure. OCE is predominantly known for planning, programming, design, acquisition, and execution of the agency's major construction projects, listed in the budget submission as the line-item construction program (LICP).

Serving as the Acting Architect over this past month has been a privilege. I began my tenure by meeting with Committee staff to understand their concerns, issues and priorities. I have also met with AOC staff to reestablish trust and confidence in leadership and ensure they know they are valued for their excellent work. I am equally committed to open and timely communication to be transparent and accountable, guaranteeing coordination with this Subcommittee, Congress, and internal entities, such as the AOC Inspector General.

I. Overview

The AOC supports the day-to-day operations of Congress, the Supreme Court and the Library. Every day, more than 2,400 AOC employees are responsible for preserving and maintaining more than 18.4 million square feet of facilities, 570 acres of grounds, and thousands of works of art. Around the clock, our team is working to preserve these historic buildings and improve the aging infrastructure for the benefit of future generations. At the same time, we are working tirelessly to upgrade our capabilities and facilities to meet current needs.

The FY 2024 budget request of \$1.128 billion represents a 14.5 percent decrease from the FY 2023 enacted appropriation. The requested funding supports critical program investments in physical security, safety and facility management priorities. The FY 2024 request also includes funding for major events which require significant planning, coordination, and resources, such as the next Presidential inauguration. The AOC's top budget requests are security, safety and accountability.

II. Prioritizing Physical Security & Safety

Physical security and safety are necessary priorities. With the support of this Committee, the AOC has made significant progress to improve the security posture across campus. The AOC continues to focus on projects prioritized in the comprehensive physical security assessment completed last year. As part of this process, the AOC is on track to implement consistent security standards across the Capitol campus. The FY 2024 budget request reflects the ongoing coordinated approach for projects, including repairing and replacing security kiosks, vehicle barriers, and other protective measures throughout the Capitol campus. Moreover, in coordination with the United States Capitol Police (USCP), and the House and Senate Sergeant at Arms, the AOC stands ready to respond to any developing requirements.

The overall safety of the AOC workforce, as well as everyone who works or visits here, is another significant priority. Across the agency, we dedicate time and attention to training, procedures and supervision to ensure our workforce operates safely. This budget request addresses essential areas of need, including fire alarm system upgrades, code deficiencies and system failure risks. One example of aging utility infrastructure is deteriorating concrete and piping components supporting the campus. These components demand immediate attention to avoid service interruptions or failures.

III. Supporting the House Community

The AOC's FY 2024 budget request contains significant priorities for the House office buildings and House operations. In close consultation with this Subcommittee and CHA, the FY 2024 budget request reflects the most critical priorities for the House office buildings and House operations.

The Cannon House Office Building Renewal project is in its final phase. Preserving historic spaces in the Cannon House Office Building presented unique challenges while working to ensure we maintain historic integrity. Current manufacturing, cost escalations, and skilled labor availability impacted the Cannon Renewal's budget when the final phase was awarded last summer. During this final phase, the AOC will complete the work to improve the quality and reliability of critical building systems and infrastructure. The building is now more accessible, efficient, and adaptable for the needs of Congress to include more usable space on the fifth floor.

At the start of the 118th Congress, the AOC's House Office building team completed 244 Member office moves. During this time, the AOC worked concurrently to improve energy efficiency and safety, installing thousands of LED tubes and hundreds of new electrical switches. Looking ahead, planning is underway to modernize Rayburn and Longworth House Office Buildings. We are also planning to devote resources to the deferred maintenance, systems and capital renewal requirements for each facility.

Beyond existing measures, the AOC continues to further evaluate strategies to reduce single-use plastics and expand sustainable measures. In FY 2022, we recycled over 426 tons of non-construction waste, including 231 tons of paper and cardboard; 60 tons of pre-consumer

compostable materials and cooking oil; 11 tons of mixed plastic, metal and glass containers; and 5.5 tons of used toner cartridges and electronic waste.

IV. Modern Management of Aging Infrastructure

Aging facilities and infrastructure present a variety of challenges and concerns. In the past three years, supply chain shortages, raw material cost increases, and the competition for skilled laborers added to the difficulty of addressing existing deficiencies. The AOC's funding request addresses an array of essential issues, including roof replacement and installation of emergency generators. Implementing an asset management system will allow the AOC to prioritize work through data-driven decisions. This program will provide a disciplined, consistent approach to annual inspections based on the average lifecycle of critical infrastructure elements. This long-term strategy will address existing backlog and deferred maintenance requirements.

Over the past year, AOC staff has welcomed back the public to the Capitol Visitor Center (CVC) and the U.S. Botanic Garden (Garden). During FY 2023, the CVC has hosted over 360,000 visitors, and with this Committee's support, the redesigned Exhibition Hall has welcomed hundreds of enthusiastic students. This innovative space provides a series of new interactive experiences sharing the story of the U.S. Capitol and the legislative process. The new Democracy Lab provides a hands-on educational area with an array of activities and the staff offer on-site and online educational programs. In FY 2023, AOC websites, including those maintained by the CVC and the Garden, recorded more than 1.3 million visitors and nearly 3.5 million pageviews.

V. Recognizing Employee Accomplishments & Meeting Mission Requirements

The AOC remains focused on initiatives to improve employee productivity and morale. For example, the AOC is expanding training programs at all workforce levels. Every AOC employee can work on professional development plans and training opportunities with their supervisor. In addition, the agency's Chief Security Officer is leading the implementation of emergency management and resiliency training.

As the AOC strives to meet its strategic benchmarks on hiring and retention, we remain committed to ensure we have the appropriate training and resources for our employees to succeed. The majority of the AOC's workforce is on-site to perform their essential roles and functions. Based on individual roles and responsibilities, we have also implemented standardized telework agreements that support a continuous and uninterrupted ability to serve and respond from anywhere, at any time.

Retention and recruitment of a talented, dedicated workforce is a key priority. To ensure that the AOC continues to attract and retain an exceptional workforce, we are also expanding outreach to educational institutions across the U.S. The AOC is intentional in ensuring it has a diverse pool of candidates for leadership position vacancies through extensive outreach and recruitment, including outreach to major professional organizations.

VI. Conclusion

On behalf of our dedicated public servants who carry out the mission every day, I appreciate the support provided by this Subcommittee. Your support has been essential to our daily operations, sustained recruitment and retention efforts, and strengthened collaboration with the Library, the United States Capitol Police, and the House Sergeant at Arms.

Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Members of the Subcommittee thank you for your time and support in consideration of the AOC's FY 2024 budget request.