



Statement of Thomas Austin, Architect

Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Request, Architect of the Capitol

Legislative Branch Subcommittee | Senate Committee on Appropriations
May 6, 2025

Chairman Mullin, Ranking Member Heinrich, and distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Architect of the Capitol's (AOC) budget request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026. We are committed to working closely with you and your staff to ensure the AOC meets the needs and expectations of the U.S. Senate in service to Congress and the American people.

It is an honor to serve as the 13th Architect of the Capitol and as a steward of the historic and vital buildings that make up the Capitol complex, ensuring their preservation, functionality, and safety for Members of Congress, staff, and visitors. As you know, I began my tenure in June of 2024 and I feel privileged, day in and day out, to be entrusted to lead this amazing agency.

I speak on behalf of the entire AOC leadership team when I say we are enormously grateful for the 2,500 hardworking, devoted AOC employees who tirelessly carry out their duties in support of Congress, the Supreme Court, the Library of Congress (Library), and the many other AOC-managed facilities.

One of my top priorities is close communication with AOC staff, which I believe is essential to building and maintaining faith and confidence in our agency's leadership. Whether discussing the particulars of daily operations or our broader visions for the future of the campus, I am equally committed to practicing clear and timely communication that ensures accountability and coordination with this Committee, Congress and AOC-internal entities.

I. Overview

The AOC plays a vital role in supporting the operations of Congress, the Supreme Court and the Library. Our staff works around-the-clock to preserve and maintain over 18.5 million square feet of facilities, 570 acres of grounds and thousands of works of art. This 24-hour, seven-days-per-week operation works in concert to preserve our historic assets and improve aging infrastructure. Beyond these preservation and maintenance priorities, our team is also responsible for hosting many key events and seasonal traditions that bring together thousands of visitors each year. From preparations for the annual Capitol Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony, to a multi-month effort in constructing the Presidential Inauguration platform, the AOC continually delivers with professionalism and expertise.

For FY 2026, the AOC is requesting \$1.3 billion in appropriations to address critical infrastructure repairs/revitalization as well as safety, security, and modernization efforts across the Capitol complex. This request reflects our commitment to ensuring the safety, preservation and operational efficiency of the Capitol complex while being responsible stewards of taxpayer funds. Over the past year, the agency navigated significant budget adjustments, including a 12 percent reduction from the FY 2024 enacted budget to the FY 2025 Full Year Continuing Resolution (CR) level, which resulted in the deferment of critical projects to future fiscal years.

The FY 2025 CR funding level required budget adjustments resulting in temporary spending limitations, deprioritized projects and operational constraints.

While the AOC adjusted to the FY 2025 CR constraints, it is critical to restore funding in FY 2026 to maintain the integrity and functionality of the Capitol complex. This includes, among other things, restoration of deferred maintenance and Capitol projects, critical security enhancements, workforce investments, and emergent critical mission requirements. The requested increase is a strategic investment in long-term efficiency, resiliency, safety and preservation.

II. Prioritizing Physical Security & Life Safety

Ensuring physical security and life safety is paramount. Thanks to your support, the AOC has made significant strides in enhancing security measures across the campus. Collaboration with internal and external partners has strengthened emergency planning and bolstered security for events at the Capitol complex. The FY 2026 budget request aligns with our coordinated approach to address security projects, consisting of significant construction or system replacement requirements to support the United States Capitol Police and House and Senate Sergeant at Arms' missions.

The agency also remains committed to staff safety, dedicating time and attention to training, processes, procedures and operations. These efforts ensure staff are well trained to assist visitors during emergencies. This budget request recognizes these essential measures with projects and requests that focus on supporting our concentrated effort to avoid hazards, risks and interruptions.

III. Supporting the Senate Community

The AOC's FY 2026 budget request highlights significant priorities for the Senate office buildings and Senate operations. These critical needs can be addressed through close collaboration with this Committee and the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration.

This budget requests also helps us continue to address each facility's deferred maintenance, systems and capital renewal requirements. Maintaining and modernizing critical infrastructure such as hearing rooms and elevators is fundamental to the daily and future operations of the Senate. Additionally, the AOC is continually looking forward to ensure future Senate requirements and modernization of the campus are accounted for in our long-term planning.

IV. Modern Management of Aging Infrastructure

The AOC is dedicated to a long-term strategy for facilities management that emphasizes the maintenance and preservation of the Capitol complex while also modernizing these spaces. The aging infrastructure and facilities of the campus present ongoing challenges which are further compounded by inflationary increases, uninterrupted operations and unforeseen emergency repairs. For example, in FY 2024, the AOC successfully completed nearly half a million work orders across the Capitol campus including nearly 80,000 in direct support of the Senate community. These work orders range from paint touch-ups and mounting pictures on the wall to ruptured pipes and power outages. This number will keep rising due to aging infrastructure.

The AOC's FY 2026 budget request focuses on critical priorities such as upgrading hearing rooms, addressing aging elevators, replacing mechanical systems, and needed renovations of fire alarms and sprinkler systems.

Additionally, the AOC is developing an Enterprise Asset Management system to create an enhanced, organized method for managing, coordinating and overseeing asset-related activities throughout their respective lifecycles. A well-developed asset management system will offer more detailed insights to enhance data-driven financial decisions and prioritization of projects, while also addressing backlog and deferred maintenance issues.

V. Workforce Investments & Meeting Mission Requirements

Our workforce is a top priority at the AOC. The agency must ensure it retains a skilled workforce capable of maintaining and modernizing the complex. Our Human Capital Strategy revolves around three pillars: talent acquisition, talent development, and engagement and retention of employees. Over the past year, the AOC aggressively recruited to fill our staffing shortfalls which resulted in a reduction of our overall vacancy rate from 11% to 8%. The AOC recently completed a study on wage-grade salaries, which contribute to retention and attrition. One important thing we learned was that pay for our Wage Graded staff was not on par with other federal agencies. The FY 2026 budget request will help us appropriately compensate and retain a skilled workforce to meet the needs of Congress.

VI. Conclusion

On behalf of the men and women at the AOC, I extend our gratitude to this Committee for your ongoing support. Your dedication and partnership in service to the American people is integral to our daily operations and mission accomplishment. Chairman Mullin, Ranking Member Heinrich, and Members of the Committee, thank you for your time and support in consideration of the AOC's FY 2026 budget request.