

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 Senate
March 22, 2023



Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Fischer, 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 Senate Committee on Rules & Administration (Rules) to ensure that the AOC meets the needs and expectations of the Senate 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).

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 personally 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 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 to include 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).

The AOC's top priorities for the FY 2024 budget are security, safety and accountability.

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 committed to ensuring these historic buildings and aging infrastructure are preserved 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 special events that require significant planning, coordination and resources, such as the next Presidential inauguration.

II. Prioritizing Physical Security & Safety

Physical security and safety are top priorities. With the support of this Committee, the AOC has made significant progress in improving the security posture across campus. The AOC continues to take steps to address 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 Senate and House Sergeant at Arms, the AOC stands ready to respond to emerging 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 continue to dedicate time and attention to training, procedures and supervision to ensure our workforce operates safely. This budget request addresses important 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 Senate Community

The AOC's FY 2024 budget request contains significant priorities for the Senate office buildings and Senate operations. The AOC plans to address necessary repairs and improvements for committee hearing rooms, elevators and air handling units.

The AOC has commenced a long-term program to renovate 32 committee hearing rooms throughout the Senate office buildings. These renovations aim to improve technology and accessibility while prioritizing historic preservation. The requested funding supports the completion of two hearing rooms each year.

This request proposes a multi-year program to refurbish and modernize 46 elevators and associated elevator machine rooms in all Senate buildings. The elevators require full refurbishment every 15 to 20 years, and the AOC has proposed a schedule to refurbish the elevators to meet safety and code standards with minimized disruption to regular operations.

In addition, the AOC will focus on several projects in the Hart Senate Office Building. One ongoing effort relates to the refurbishment of the air handling units. Originally installed in 1982, the units are nearing the end of their operational life, and the FY 2024 budget request will support the second phase of this construction project.

AOC's funding request covers the second year of a multi-year program to renovate Senate food service operations. The Senate jurisdiction oversees nine food service facilities in the Senate office buildings and on the Senate side of the U.S. Capitol Building, which include vending and catering services on the Senate side of the Capitol campus. In addition, as requested by this Committee and Rules, the AOC has proposed a renovation program to transform current food

service outlets into a dining experience reflecting the history and traditions of the United States Senate.

The AOC will continue the Senate Recycling Program, reducing single-use plastics and advancing waste management in Senate facilities as part of ongoing maintenance and process improvement. In FY 2022, over 426 tons of non-construction waste was recycled through the AOC's program, 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. Beyond existing measures, the AOC continues to further evaluate strategies to reduce single-use plastics and expand sustainable measures.

Finally, as part of an ongoing collaboration with the Senate Sergeant at Arms, the FY 2024 request also includes a comprehensive building renovation at the Daniel Webster Page Residence to improve the building's functionality and accessibility.

IV. Modern Management of Aging Infrastructure

Aging facilities and infrastructure present a variety of issues and concerns. The past three years have only compounded many of these concerns, as supply chain shortages, raw material cost increases and the competition for skilled laborers have increased the difficulty of addressing existing deficiencies. Across the board, the AOC's funding request supports facility management and addresses an array of essential issues, including roof replacement and installation of emergency generators.

Implementing an asset management system allows us to prioritize work through data-driven decisions. As we continue to develop our asset management system, we will promote proactive maintenance-based strategies. This program provides a disciplined, consistent approach to annual inspections based on the average lifecycle of key infrastructure elements. With this approach, the AOC will develop a long-term strategy to address existing backlogs and the associated costs of deferred maintenance requirements.

The AOC also remains focused on comprehensive planning for the entire campus, taking into consideration immediate and long-term needs. With the Committee's support, this forward-looking plan and accompanying recommendations will set forth a robust approach for future generations.

Over the past year, our staff has been delighted to welcome back the public to the Capitol Visitor Center (CVC) and the U.S. Botanic Garden (Garden). Already 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. In addition, the new Democracy Lab provides a hands-on educational area with an array of activities for both the young and the young-at-heart, and staff offer on-site and online educational programs. Also, in FY 2023, AOC websites, including the sites maintained by the CVC and the Garden, have 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 morale. For example, the AOC is expanding training programs at all levels of the workforce. Every AOC employee can work with their supervisor on professional development plans and training opportunities. In addition, the agency's Chief Security Officer is leading implementation of emergency management and resiliency training.

As the AOC strives to meet its strategic benchmarks on hiring and retention, we remain focused on ensuring that we have the appropriate training and resources our employees need to be successful. Most of our workforce is required to be on-site to perform their roles and responsibilities. At the same time, certain functions can be performed off-site and, as appropriate, we have implemented standardized government telework agreements that support our continuous and uninterrupted ability to serve and respond from anywhere, any time.

To ensure that the AOC continues to attract and retain an exceptional workforce in the years ahead, we are also expanding outreach to educational institutions across the U.S. In just a few months, the AOC will welcome eight new apprentices who will be working throughout the agency with experienced mentors. Through this program and other training initiatives, the AOC is preparing to carry on the traditions of unique craftsmanship and ingenuity needed to work behind the scenes to support Congress, the Supreme Court and the Library.

Conclusion

On behalf of our dedicated public servants who carry out the mission every day, I appreciate the support provided by this Committee. Your support has been essential to our daily operations, sustained recruitment and retention efforts, and strengthened collaboration with Congress, the Supreme Court, the Library, USCP, and Senate and House Sergeant at Arms.

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