

Statement of J. Brett Blanton
Architect of the Capitol



Architect of the Capitol Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations

**Statement before the Subcommittee on Legislative Branch,
Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate**

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Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Braun, and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to present the Architect of the Capitol's (AOC) Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 budget request of \$1.67 billion.

Crowned by the magnificent Dome, the U.S. Capitol is the center of the Capitol campus, as well as a widely recognized icon of the American people and their government. The building's origins go back to our nation's early years. Pierre Charles L'Enfant designed the city of Washington with the U.S. Capitol Building at the center, and President George Washington approved the building's original design in 1793.

As the nation has grown so has the U.S. Capitol: today it covers more than 1.5 million square feet, with over 600 rooms and miles of corridors. It has been burnt, rebuilt, extended and restored. Today, the AOC is committed to preserving L'Enfant's legacy and to ensuring that the U.S. Capitol endures as one of the most architecturally impressive and symbolically important buildings in the world.

As this Subcommittee knows, the AOC is working constantly behind the scenes to support the day-to-day operations of Congress, the Supreme Court and the Library of Congress. Carrying on traditions of unique craftsmanship and ingenuity, the AOC is responsible for the operations and care of more than 18.4 million square feet of facilities, 570 acres of grounds and thousands of works of art. There are 30,000 people working across campus every day, and more than 2,200 AOC employees work around the clock, serving in diverse roles to maintain and preserve the buildings and grounds.

Working together, the AOC team is committed to providing a safe and inspiring experience for visitors as well as those who work here. The AOC's daily success relies upon the exceptional professionalism and hard work of our staff.

I would like to extend my appreciation for the Subcommittee's work to achieve the bicameral, bipartisan Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022. The Subcommittee's support for the AOC's work is truly appreciated, and I commend the efforts of the Legislative Branch Subcommittee Members and staff for their ongoing support of the AOC's work and goals.

As we move forward from the incredible challenges over the last two years, I would like to work with the Subcommittee to identify areas where multi-year funding will enable us to be more efficient and effective in the planning, design and execution of ongoing improvements. Otherwise, we may face vulnerabilities associated with the deterioration and deferred maintenance of these historic buildings and treasured grounds. As I have testified previously, delayed funding has consequences.

This budget proposal reflects changing programs and resource needs. The AOC's funding request seeks resources for campuswide architectural and engineering design; project, property and construction management; planning and development for buildings and major projects across the Capitol campus; procurement, including major construction contracts; congressional move

designs; information technology; financial management; legal services; and management of historic preservation and sustainability programs.

AOC employees need to have and maintain the necessary skills and equipment to achieve our mission on behalf of the American people. Moreover, we are seeking support for efforts focused on our employees' well-being and professional development. In addition, we are requesting resources for new strategic initiatives like AOC University, an effort to expand training and professional development opportunities for staff.

To achieve our shared goals, we need this Subcommittee's support to maintain a positive, productive and safe environment for AOC employees as well as all who work and visit here. Across the board, the AOC is focused on recruiting and retaining critical staff to accomplish this important work and, accordingly, our FY 2023 budget request includes necessary funding to maintain a sufficient workforce.

We need to work together to adopt a long-term and comprehensive approach for planning, design and completion of major projects. Finally, this request reflects agencywide efforts to transform the Capitol campus by implementing a more predictive and effective approach to facilities maintenance.

I. Prioritizing Physical Security Projects

As this Subcommittee knows, physical security across the Capitol campus is a top priority. In close and continuous coordination with my counterparts at the U.S. Capitol Police (USCP) and the House and Senate Sergeants at Arms, I am working tirelessly to make the Capitol campus as safe and open as possible.

The AOC's FY 2023 budget request demonstrates an emphasis on security needs throughout the Capitol campus and, accordingly, these prioritized projects constitute a significant portion of our budget request, reflecting the urgent and significant recommendations of the comprehensive physical security assessment completed by the AOC on behalf of the Capitol Police Board. Working with this Subcommittee, as well as my partners on the Capitol Police Board, we must address the top priorities arising from this assessment.

While some projects can be executed swiftly, the complexity of others demand greater planning, consultation and design.

To that end, the AOC is requesting proportionate funds to support and complement the USCP's increased operations and allow for full implementation of programs to address pressing security needs. This budget demonstrates the interdependence of the AOC and USCP security improvement projects.

For example, the AOC seeks funding to improve direct communication lines with USCP related to incident management, security responses and coordination. In addition, the AOC is seeking

funding to support emergency response, security and resilience requirements of the AOC's life, health and safety responsibilities to the Capitol Police Board. In addition, the requested funds provide necessary support for exigent requirements and special events that arise unexpectedly. At the same time, the AOC is requesting resources to provide rapid response support to unplanned critical security events as well as rapidly deployable security elements.

In addition, the AOC is requesting resources to address a finding by the AOC's Inspector General regarding Emergency Management Training. With this requested funding, the AOC will be able to train and prepare AOC staff to respond to emergency situations, including natural disasters or other life safety emergency events. The budget request also reflects the AOC's ongoing efforts to improve cybersecurity and to protect our networks from any intrusion by malicious threats. The AOC maintains continuous 24/7 monitoring to detect and respond to any cyber incidents.

Finally, this request reflects the AOC's increased responsibility to acquire and maintain pandemic response materials.

We know our work is essential for the safety of Members and the staff working on the Capitol campus, and we are dedicated to ensuring continuity of operations. With the Subcommittee's full support, the AOC can fulfill its responsibilities to support our partners. With adequate resources, we can keep the campus safe and secure.

II. Tackling Aging Infrastructure with Technological Approaches

I am continuing efforts to bring transformative change across campus by deploying modern tools to tackle the challenges of aging facilities and infrastructure. Over the past two years, the pandemic has affected costs of all major projects in the form of supply chain shortages, raw material cost increases and increases in competition for skilled labor.

The AOC's capital budget request is focused on projects with immediate urgency. Project funding will support the lifespan of the facilities as well as address critical needs ranging from preserving priceless artwork to replacing roofs, installing emergency generators and improving campus security. The AOC's priority projects reflect identified needs. These are well-documented areas where the period of useful life has already been exhausted or is approaching its end.

Looking ahead, we are working on solutions that will improve predictability of maintenance needs and create efficiencies to save taxpayer dollars. With this approach, the AOC can mitigate future costs associated with deferred maintenance requirements.

With the Subcommittee's support, the AOC is already launching a new Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) system that will provide a thorough asset management strategy to inform work priorities and provide for data-driven fiscal decisions and prioritization. Specifically, EAM will serve as a new tool to aid decision-making about operating, maintaining, and renewing

building and infrastructure assets such as machinery, vehicles and construction equipment. With sufficient resources for ongoing implementation, EAM will allow the AOC to manage maintenance-based strategies proactively, mitigate obsolescence, restore reliability, reduce long-term costs and forecast resource requirements.

EAM will also maximize return on investment while enhancing decision-making priorities. I am committed to implementing a disciplined, consistent approach to annual inspections and anticipating key infrastructure lifecycles.

Every day we work to preserve our historic and aging infrastructure for the benefit of future generations. At the same time, we are working tirelessly to upgrade our capabilities and facilities to meet the technological, space, sustainability and accessibility needs of a 21st-century workforce, some of whom are working in 19th-century buildings.

III. Supporting Safety Standards and Solutions

The safety of everyone on the Capitol campus is a top priority. The budget request reflects prioritization of projects based on imminent needs. Life and safety issues, as well as components that are beyond their service life, are high on the list. The AOC manages safety, fire, environmental, code compliance and facility safety programs across the Capitol campus. We serve as the main point of contact for external regulatory agencies for occupational safety and health, fire protection, accessibility, and environmental matters. The AOC budget also includes the Office of Attending Physician as a service offering medical surveillance and support of health units on campus.

The AOC's FY 2023 budget request includes funding for several life and safety related projects. Fire alarm and sprinkler system upgrades in the U.S. Capitol and other critical areas around the Capitol campus will address code deficiencies, reduce the risk of system failure, and improve facility safety for building occupants.

For example, we have requested funds to replace key fire alarm components in the Dirksen Senate Office Building. Similarly, we have requested funds to upgrade the fire alarm system in the Library of Congress' James Madison Memorial Building and the sprinkler systems in the John Adams Building.

Another critical area is the very serious and pressing need to address utility tunnel repairs. Within the utility tunnels, deteriorating concrete and piping components need immediate repair to reduce the risk of tunnel failure. These repairs are urgent to avoid interruptions of electrical, water, steam and communications services to the Capitol campus for an extended period.

In this area and others, we continue to dedicate time and attention to training, safety procedure review and communications, and supervision of our workforce to ensure they are operating in the safest manner possible across the entire campus. A critical component of this effort is ensuring that all staff have access to the proper personal protective equipment (PPE). PPE used by AOC

employees is as diverse as the jobs they perform. From hard hats to insulated tools, PPE helps keep employees safe. Most commonly, AOC employees rely on safety glasses, safety shoes and hard hats. But there are many not-so-common items that our employees depend on to keep them safe. Our arborists need specialized gear compliant for safe arboricultural operations, including fall-resistant harnesses and safety helmets. AOC painters wear full face respirators, gloves, head socks and lab coats to protect lungs, eyes and skin as well as bump caps to protect their heads when working in tight spaces or near ceilings. At times, these expert professionals must also wear light-adjusting, ballistic-proof safety glasses to protect against paint and UV light that provides support for employees like stone masons, sheet metal mechanics and painters who switch between indoor and outdoor work.

In addition, AOC electricians must wear 100 percent cotton uniforms to prevent melting of fibers in the event of an arc flash. Metal buttons, grommets or zippers must be avoided to circumvent shock hazards, and employees must work with insulated tools such as screwdrivers, ratchets, pliers and electrical hazard rated safety boots and leather gloves to avoid workplace injuries due to shock, electrocution or other hazards. When working around high voltage, AOC employees must wear ear plugs, safety glasses and special suits.

All of these efforts, as well as extensive monitoring and reporting on medical surveillance, demonstrate the AOC's deep commitment to safe standards and environments for all employees and visitors.

IV. Senate Priorities and Programs

Working with the U.S. Senate Committee on Rules & Administration, the AOC is beginning a multi-year program to renovate hearing and committee meeting rooms in the Senate office buildings. As part of this collaborative process, the AOC will develop a comprehensive schedule for the hearing and committee room renovation program. Each hearing room renovation will require approximately one year to complete, with a plan to renovate two hearing rooms under construction at one time. With this endeavor, the AOC will strive for the greatest efficiencies beneficial to the entire Senate community.

After substantial time is allowed for consultation, planning and design, this renovation program will achieve important infrastructure upgrades; install advanced lighting, audiovisual and HVAC systems; enlarge the daises to support current committee sizes; and address accessibility as well as current fire and life safety codes.

The program will also prioritize historic preservation, updating the rooms' carpeting, furniture and finishes while ensuring that the rooms remain true to their original architectural intent. This important and long-term effort will benefit from the AOC's new Building Official program, a group of dedicated experts ensuring stakeholders follow the same set of established building codes and consistent processes for permitting.

I am also well-aware of stakeholders' concerns to address the limited capacity of the existing Senate Employees' Child Care Center (SECCC), especially at the infant and toddler levels.

A congressionally directed study, completed in April 2021, presented alternatives that would increase the capacity of the SECCC at alternate locations. Working with this Subcommittee and the U.S. Senate Committee on Rules & Administration, the AOC is exploring cost estimates for the potential scope of work. Throughout this planning process, the AOC will continue to work closely with this Subcommittee on planning, pre-design activities, timelines and cost estimates.

Concurrently, at the Subcommittee's request, the AOC will provide support and technical expertise for a report on an additional Senate office building. To achieve the goals of this effort, the AOC is already seeking input from this Subcommittee as well as the U.S. Senate Committee on Rules & Administration on the space requirements. A critical element of the planning process will be an updated space needs assessment to develop program requirements for the new facility. While there seems to be a strong consensus about the need for space, the planning process will provide clarification about the specific types of spaces required as well as inform the necessary design process.

Since substantial time has passed since a new building was completed on campus, the design and construction of any new facility on the Capitol campus would be a major project spanning a multi-year period. At the same time, necessary and planned improvements to existing Senate office buildings would still need to take place.

Accessibility also remains a significant priority, with accessibility considerations incorporated into every project. This Subcommittee's support enabled the installation of an accessible lift on the Senate floor last year. As another example, part of the U.S. Botanic Garden Conservatory Security Upgrade Project will include the installation of automatic door openers to improve accessibility.

The Senate Office Buildings jurisdiction recently completed the second sequence of the Russell Exterior Envelope Repair and Restoration Project. This multi-phase project is designed to preserve the exterior envelope of the historic Russell Senate Office Building, including its exterior stone, wood windows and glazed doors. The second sequence of the project focused on the south and east sides of the building, with the area directly facing the U.S. Capitol finishing shortly before the 2021 Presidential Inauguration. The AOC's work will restore the stonework and window restoration on the final sequence of the project, which includes the west side of the building and the Rotunda area.

In addition, the ongoing Russell Courtyard renovation will address several accessibility issues so that everyone in the Senate community can enjoy this renewed green space. The full renovation of the Russell Courtyard will be completed and fully opened this year. While providing a refreshing and accessible outdoor area for senators, staff and visitors, this project is also integral to the AOC's commitment to preserving historic stonework across the Capitol campus.

The AOC is working hard to provide modern and functional office space to offices across campus. For example, the Hart Senate Office Building provides offices for 50 Senate offices, three committees and several subcommittees. All Member suites received modular walls and furniture between 2003 and 2008, and Senate committees received modular walls and furniture between 2007 and 2011. As part of our effort to renovate aging furniture and improve workspaces, the AOC plans to replace modular furniture in 50 Member offices and 15 committee spaces over a 16-year period.

The AOC is continuing efforts related to the *Mountain and Clouds* sculpture by Alexander Calder in the Hart Building. *Mountains and Clouds* was the last work of Calder (and his only work with a separate mobile and stabile). It was originally designed as a mountain-shaped floor installation and four oscillating clouds suspended from a single shaft from the Hart Building roof.

The AOC has completed the parameters study to establish safety standards for possible fabrication and installation of a new *Clouds* portion of the sculpture. Presently, the Calder Foundation is developing an official proposal for the re-creation of the *Clouds* mobile that will be sent to the Senate Commission on Art for acceptance. If approved, the AOC will help facilitate the installation of the *Clouds* mobile, provide engineering information and act as a building consultant.

While private funds will be used for the fabrication and installation of any new mobile, the AOC will require adequate resources to support the design, fabrication, establishment of engineering parameters and oversight of installation.

In the FY 2023 budget request, the AOC requested substantial funding to address the 26 air handling units (AHUs) in the Hart Building. In December 2012, a design was completed for replacement of the AHUs. Unfortunately, funds provided in FY 2020 for the project's first year had to be allocated to emergency contingency expenses. Presently, the AOC is conducting a redesign to update previous drawings, provide further refurbishment details and phasing, mitigate risks, and provide an updated Independent Government Cost Estimate for the project.

In doing so, the AOC is seeking a cost-effective solution for this identified need. Refurbished AHUs will have the same expected life span of 20-30 years at approximately a third of the cost of replacement. Refurbishment will also have less impact on the Senate community, along with a shorter construction duration.

As a further initiative to improve services to the Senate community, the Senate restaurant master plan study will set forth a plan for a food service program which will transform current eating spaces into a dining experience representative of the history, heritage and prestige of the Senate. The study will also recommend facility modernization concepts that will increase operating efficiencies, improve the business model, and provide more convenient service for customers through the implementation of technological advancements, including online ordering and remote pick-up.

There are nine food service operations in the Senate office buildings and on the Senate side of the U.S. Capitol Building. The Senate kitchen and dining areas cover approximately 36,500 square feet of space. The AOC is requesting \$8.1 million in the FY 2023 budget for the first phase of restaurant modernization, which includes the design of all food service outlets in the Senate office buildings.

In a companion request, the Capitol Building jurisdiction is also requesting \$40.2 million in the FY 2023 budget for modernization of Senate food service outlets in the U.S. Capitol Building. Funding will cover the redesign and construction of all food service outlets in the U.S. Capitol Building.

Throughout the U.S. Capitol, the AOC seeks to maintain compliance with fire and life safety codes, to avoid potential hazards to building occupants as well as the building's historic art and architecture. Kitchen equipment, fixtures and interior finishes have reached the end of their lifespan, requiring constant maintenance. This project will combine the food service venues on both levels into a consolidated, efficient food service venue on the basement level, with the ground-floor kitchen exclusively supporting the Senate Dining Room. New equipment, fixtures and finishes will support popular menu offerings, allow for new offerings and increase service efficiency.

Increased labor is necessary to effectively address the needs of outdated kitchen infrastructure. For instance, the existing exhaust system jeopardizes the safety of building occupants, the U.S. Capitol's priceless art and architecture, and the efficiency and quality of food service on the Capitol campus.

The AOC is also working with partners at the Senate Recording Studio to upgrade the rooms' audiovisual equipment since the current equipment is not designed for multimedia presentations or video conferencing.

V. Sustaining our Commitment to Future Generations

We are doing all that we can to adopt best practices to reduce the environmental impact of Senate operations. Across campus, the AOC is focused on sustainability and energy conservation efforts that prioritize resource conservation. In fact, over the last 15 years, the AOC has reduced its energy intensity levels by 50 percent, reducing energy requirements and ultimately saving taxpayer dollars. Through its practices, the AOC sequestered 700,000 pounds of carbon dioxide, saved nearly 8 million gallons of water, and saved over 250,000 kilowatt-hours of energy on an annual basis.

The AOC's Senate team is pursuing certification with the Green Restaurants Association. This process will demonstrate our ongoing efforts to "green" our operations by using transparent, science-based standards. Working with the food-service contractors, the Senate restaurants will

be even more environmentally sustainable in energy, water, waste, food, chemicals and disposables.

The agency has also coordinated with its food service providers to reduce plastic waste with a wide range of approaches. We have reviewed every aspect of the service to find ways to improve our practices. In the Senate, the use of Styrofoam has been eliminated completely. In addition, we have adopted compostable straws and eliminated the use of single-use plastic straws. There is also greater use of wax paper instead of plastic, and we have transitioned certain beverages from the product line to large cans instead of plastic bottles. A similar effort was made to ensure that milk could be available in bulk containers.

As another way to encourage individual practices around consumption and waste, the Senate has continued its modest discount program for anyone that brings their own container for coffee. In addition, we have eliminated use of portion-controlled products (i.e., ketchup packets) and replaced offerings with condiment wells wherever possible.

At the same time, the AOC continues to improve recycling programs, not only for personal use inside facilities but also on construction sites. For example, the AOC diverted 10,000 tons of construction and demolition debris from the landfill, recycling 98 percent of all construction debris generated. We also continue to implement sustainable groundskeeping practices such as reducing water demand by capturing runoff and using native plants and perennials.

In the Senate office buildings, the AOC has proposed a formal study of waste and recycling operations by conducting a multi-phase pilot with interested senators and committees. The pilot will collect waste, recycling data and client feedback. With this information, we can make informed decisions about effective recycling bin configurations, waste collection tools and options for post-consumer compost collection.

Throughout the Senate office buildings, the AOC seeks to improve the waste and recycling program by increasing recycling rates; creating consistent waste and recycling bin standards; promoting awareness on waste separation; improving AOC collection efficiency; and decreasing clutter and tripping hazards of excess bins in workspaces.

This project also aligns AOC operations with industry best practices by instituting centralized collection bin placement of all waste and recycling material. In doing so, the AOC will evaluate and analyze the impact of centralized collection bins on recycling. We will also examine behaviors by measuring recycling rates before and after implementation. To implement the most effective solutions, the AOC will gather participant feedback specific to recycling collection to understand occupants' experiences of different collection configurations and to assess feasibility of centralized collection in office and committee spaces. In addition, the AOC will engage with recycling champions to identify gaps in recycling program communications as well as the most effective methods to disseminate information.

Beyond this initiative, the AOC will evaluate resource requirements for post-consumer composting collection in offices and dining spaces. As directed by this Subcommittee in 2021, the AOC is developing a formal study to assess the feasibility of restarting post-consumer composting in the Senate buildings, which was terminated previously. The study includes a multi-phase pilot program and third-party analysis, culminating in a report of recommendations, anticipated resource requirements and prospective benefits to the Senate. The AOC will evaluate the resources and authorities required to add post-consumer composting to the current waste management program in both public spaces and private offices in the Senate buildings. We will also analyze the benefits of key aspects of the larger waste management program, including collection methods, labor allocation and resource use.

For example, the pilot program will contrast baseline waste management processes with several small-scale pilot phases to assess real-world impacts of four specific variables: bin location configurations, waste collection procedures, post-consumer composting collection in designated pilot offices and post-consumer composting collection in dining spaces. Baseline and piloted processes will be evaluated through several qualitative and quantitative methods, including waste sampling, surveys, and measurement of resource allocations for waste collection and transport.

Subsequently, third-party analysis will validate baseline and pilot data; observe and analyze procedural changes; and recommend options to improve waste management efficiency and restart a post-consumer composting program in the Senate buildings. The AOC expects to begin the pilot program soon.

The AOC is also pioneering new practices at the U.S. Botanic Garden (USBG), a treasured public institution. With the Subcommittee's support, we seek to continue the USBG's Urban Agriculture Program, which provides educational resources, training for veterans, capacity building programs with other public gardens, and educator professional development programming. In a short period, this program achieved demonstrated success to support communities facing food access challenges.

In addition, the USBG is requesting funding to complete the design phase of the Production Facility Renewal Project. With resources for substantial renovation and renewal of this critical support facility, the USBG can continue to achieve key goals related to horticulture, operations and maintenance, education and outreach, and sustainability.

Looking to the future, the AOC will begin work on an updated Capitol Complex Master Plan, which will serve as a foundational document for master planning over the next 20 years. With the Subcommittee's support, the AOC will be able to engage in necessary planning for the future. This report will set forth a robust vision for tomorrow's generations.

VI. Pandemic Procurement and Preparedness

While all of us look forward to better and healthier days ahead, the COVID-19 pandemic is still impacting our operations and projects. As the Congress labors day and night, AOC employees are working nonstop to keep the entire campus clean, sanitized and well maintained. From day one of this pandemic, the AOC team has worked very closely with the Office of Attending Physician. The AOC was designated as the legislative branch purchasing agent for PPE and provides weekly inventory updates as part of ongoing work to ensure that there are adequate and authentic supplies. In addition, the AOC has ensured the specialized cleaning of spaces throughout the Senate office buildings whenever it has been needed. In response to a request from the Senate community earlier this year, the AOC worked diligently to procure at-home COVID testing kits that were distributed widely to Senate staff working in D.C. offices. Taken together, these efforts reflect the AOC's comprehensive effort to promote a healthier work environment for all.

As the Subcommittee is aware, school group tours have returned to the U.S. Capitol. As we plan to welcome even more visitors back, we are excited to launch the CVC's Exhibition Hall Redesign Project later this year. This project aims to provide visitors with an engaging environment to learn about the legislative process and democracy. We look forward to welcoming students of all ages to this wonderful new space.

VII. Conclusion

While I remain committed to ongoing improvements in our daily operations, the AOC has already made significant progress on transformational efforts.

Across the board, I am committed to leading the agency in long-term, strategic planning that will prepare the campus for the next century. With your ongoing support, we can protect and preserve this cherished institution as well as all of those who serve here.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our FY 2023 budget request, and I look forward to the opportunity to address any questions.