

September 14, 2021

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

Dear Senate Appropriations Chair Leahy:

On behalf of the undersigned groups, associations, and individuals, we urge you to significantly increase funding for the Legislative branch. A strong and representative democracy requires a strong Congress that has sufficient resources to serve the American people and fulfil its constitutional duties. These additional funds are essential to bolster recruitment and retention of expert congressional staff and diversify those who are able to serve; empower committees, personal offices, and support agencies to fully meet the demands of their oversight and legislative responsibilities; renew the Legislative branch's aging physical and technological infrastructure and address its apparent security issues; and ensure that the Congress will remain a sentinel of our democracy and a beacon to the world.

You have long been a champion for a strong, independent, and capable Legislative branch. Nevertheless, over the last quarter-century, the Congress has at times made funding decisions concerning its own operations that have not served the institution well. The Legislative branch disproportionately has suffered from underfunding and the loss of institutional capabilities. Non-defense discretionary spending for the rest of government has increased at twice the rate as funding for the Legislative branch. With respect to the Legislative branch itself, the vast majority of new funding has gone to infrastructure and security. While government writ large has scaled up its work, Congress's legislative and oversight capacity has fallen behind.

House Appropriators proposed a 13.8 percent increase in funding levels for the Legislative branch for FY 2022, which (excluding the Senate) would increase funding to \$4.802 billion, a change of \$589.1 million.¹ We encourage you to consider adopting this percentage increase as a baseline and adjusting it upwards as appropriate. We note, for instance, that Senate committee funding levels are down \$59 million in constant dollars, or 19.9 percent, from the 111th Congress, and half of Senate committees experienced cuts in funding levels between the 107th and 117th Congresses.² Funding for personal offices — reflected in the Senators' Official Personnel and Office Expense Account — decreased in constant dollars from \$502 million in FY 2010 to \$461 million in FY 2021,³ an eight percent decrease, even as

¹ "Appropriations Committee Releases Fiscal Year 2022 Legislative Branch Funding Bill," House Committee on Appropriations (June 23, 2021), <https://appropriations.house.gov/news/press-releases/appropriations-committee-releases-fiscal-year-2022-legislative-branch-funding>

² "How Senate Committees Get Their Money," First Branch Forecast (March 25, 2021), <https://firstbranchforecast.com/2021/03/25/how-senate-committees-get-their-money-2/>

³ "25+ Years of Legislative Branch Appropriations: Data Spanning from 1994-2021 All In One Place," First Branch Forecast (February 5, 2021),

the US population increased by 23 million people.⁴ Senate personal offices automatically increase funding for constituent service work, which highlights how much policymaking capacity has been lost.

What this means in practice is a Senate that has staff less diverse than the population it serves, policymaking bodies less able to meet the challenges of governing, and support offices less able to respond to infrastructural challenges. The inability to sufficiently retain expert staff over time combined with constricted channels to support bringing on interns is but one example of a pipeline that skews public service towards those with financial means – and personnel is policy. The Senate is attempting to do better but needs greater financial resources to do so. This is true across the board.

We thank you for your continued leadership on the Appropriations Committee and your willingness to invest in our democracy, starting with the Legislative branch. We encourage you to continue in those efforts and wish to lend you our support. Please call on us to help by contacting Daniel Schuman, Policy Director for Demand Progress at Daniel@DemandProgress.org.

Sincerely yours,

Common Defense
Consumer Action
Demand Progress
Greenpeace USA
People's Action
People For The American Way
RootsAction.org
Sunrise Movement
United We Dream

* Affiliations listed for identification purposes only.

cc: Sen. Reed

<https://firstbranchforecast.com/2021/02/05/25-years-of-legislative-branch-appropriations-data-spanning-from-1994-2021-all-in-one-place/>

⁴ "Historical Population Change Data (1910-2020)," U.S. Census (April 26, 2021)
<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/dec/popchange-data-text.html>