Dear Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Herrera Beutler, and Members of the House Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on creating a centralized House Intern Resource Office.

Congressional internships provide opportunities for students to learn first-hand about the legislative process, to develop professional skills and networks, and to build their resumes and prepare for future jobs—either within public service or the private sector. Speaking personally, my congressional internship reaffirmed that public service is my professional calling.

Congressional offices also benefit greatly from hosting congressional interns. Interns help professional staffers keep abreast of legislative and casework developments; provide support for constituent services and press outreach; aid in conducting research, Capitol Hill tours, and press coordination; and help with administrative tasks, freeing up staff to focus on other priorities.

This mutually beneficial relationship helps keep Congress running.

Congress took a huge step forward in 2018 when it enacted H.R. 6157, which provided a separate fund for lawmakers to pay congressional interns—allocating $20,000 to each House office for stipends. Thanks to the leadership of this subcommittee, the per office stipend was increased to $25,000 in FY 2021 and $35,000 in FY 2022. That 40 percent increase from the prior fiscal year illustrated your commitment to providing more resources to support internships. This enhanced level of support for congressional internships will open the door wider for countless prospective interns, further diversifying the talent and experience pool.

In addition to broadening the number of people who can participate in internships, the House should further strengthen and professionalize the internship onboarding process. Currently, offices provide an uneven experience: each individual office has the responsibility for recruitment, crafting its internship program and providing interns with tools and skills for a successful experience. What happens if an office doesn’t have the bandwidth to provide guidance or materials that result in a meaningful internship experience? What if the staffer in charge of the internship does not have the capacity or resources to spend quality time with the interns? There is a deep institutional need for centralized support for recruiting, onboarding, and guidance.

On top of uneven resources and guidance throughout Congress, there is currently no centralized institutional recordkeeping around interns—making it impossible to reliably measure internship program success. There are no metrics or internal data on who interns on Capitol Hill or in congressional districts; how many paid internship opportunities are available; the demographic characteristics and distribution of internships across the population, including women, racial minorities, and students from less privileged backgrounds; and whether the compensation is sufficient to attract the most talented interns regardless of familial wealth, especially for the
many students who would work and live in high-cost Washington, D.C. Simply put, gathering facts and data around internships in the House is nearly impossible. The ensuing lack of transparency and accountability raise questions around the efficacy of the congressional congressional internship pipeline—especially concerning inequality and inaccessibility.

Last year, the subcommittee grappled with many of these difficult issues. The report accompanying the FY 2022 Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill included a directive to have the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and Office of Diversity and Inclusion (OD&I) conduct a feasibility study on recreating a centralized House internship office. Similar to the Lyndon Baines Johnson internship program from 1974 to 1994, the proposed office would provide support services, such as housing, training, and professional development to congressional interns as well as serving as a resource hub for personal, committee, and leadership offices. The report language on page 17 is as follows:

The Committee directs the ODI, working in coordination with CAO, to conduct a study on the feasibility of creating a centralized House internship and fellowship office to provide support services, such as housing, training, and professional development, to Congressional interns as well as act as a resource hub for Standing Committees, Leadership Offices, and House offices. The feasibility study shall address inequities in access to congressional internships and shall include the viability of establishing an intern stipend program for interns from underrepresented backgrounds, including those who attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges or Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and other Minority Serving Institutions as defined in section 371(a) of the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1067q).

The study was expected to be an instrumental step in providing a proper framework for creating a centralized resource center for full-time congressional staffers and interns. Unfortunately, we are unaware of whether this report has been completed or if there is a timeline for its completion. However, the CAO and ODI should have enough information to brief the committee on their findings thus far. Regardless, it would be appropriate to to stand up a pilot office with preliminary personnel while awaiting its findings, to avoid additional lost time.

We urge the committee to appropriate $500,000 for the creation of a centralized Internship Office to coordinate intern-related matters. The Office should be responsible for advertising internships; reaching out to historically underrepresented communities; providing guidance, training, support, assistance to interns regarding their work environment; and gathering demographic and other data about interns employed by the House of Representatives in personal, committee, and leadership offices. This Office should coordinate with OD&I and CAO and have its own public website that promotes its work.

Congress must be more proactive and intentional about identifying and recruiting high-potential interns from around the country. The creation of such an office would be transformative for the institution, its staff, and the countless interns in the future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this testimony.