June 19, 2017

Dr. Keith Hall Congressional Budget Office Ford House Office Building, Fourth Floor Washington, DC 20515

Dear Dr Hall

We, the undersigned organizations, write to express our appreciation of the Congressional Budget Office's efforts to provide Congress with the information it needs to make economic and budgetary decisions. We acknowledge the CBO's longstanding role of providing written estimates of the financial impact of legislation and providing Americans of all political persuasions the ability to see how Congress plans to spend their money.

We note in particular your efforts to make this information available to the public on your website. As you know, the legislative branch has made a significant effort to release government information online as data, with the House going so far as to adopt that as part of its rules package. As organizations interested in government transparency and accountability--many of whom rely on that information--we would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you how digital best practices could help you further your agency's mission and make those hard-won insights even more broadly available to the general public.

The following topics could serve as a starting point for a conversation.

### Website URLs

We are regular consumers of CBO reports and often seek to link a CBO report to the bill it concerns. At the present, there are some barriers to programmatically gathering CBO scores based on the bill number. The webpages for scores do not appear to follow a specific format based on the bill in question. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss whether publication at predictable URLs would be possible in such a way as to reflect publication date and bill number.

## **Bulk data for scores**

One data point of particular importance to us is the final CBO score for a bill. While that information is contained in the reports, it does not appear to be available as a structured data format that can be systematically gathered. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss whether there's a way to centrally publish that data or make it easier to extract.

# **Score formatting**

It is our understanding that every CBO score reports similar information, but that information may be presented in different written report styles. In recent years, CBO has standardized report formats, but perhaps there is more that could be done to ensure that consistent tables appear in all reports.

#### **Archive of full score histories**

Some CBO scores that previously appeared on CBO's website appear to have been removed.<sup>1</sup> This information continues to be useful for us, as it provides important historical context, helps illuminate trends, and provides crucial information to members. We would be grateful to learn more on why that information apparently was removed, and work with the Government Publishing Office to publish and archive all CBO documents and data in govinfo.gov, their digital repository.

### **Improved search functionality**

The current CBO website allows several options for search filtering, providing users with multiple views into the data. For some fiscal-oriented organizations, additional functionality like the ability to search based on spending or deficit impacts would be particularly useful.

Thank you again for all that you and your staff do to ensure budgetary transparency. We would welcome the opportunity to speak with you or representatives from your office.

# Sincerely,

American Association of Law Libraries American Library Association American Society of News Editors Association of Alternative Newsmedia Campaign for Liberty Center for Data Innovation Center for Responsive Politics Coalition to Reduce Spending **Defense Priorities** 

**Demand Progress** 

Free Government Information

FreedomWorks

Government Accountability Project

Government Information Watch

GovTrack us

Issue One

Lincoln Network

National Taxpayers Union Foundation

Niskanen Center

Project on Government Oversight

Ouorum

R Street Institute

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press

Sunlight Foundation

Taxpayers for Common Sense

**Taxpayers Protection Alliance** 

TechFreedom

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> For instance, this link used to provide the score for H.R. 698 in the 113th Congress, but is no longer available: https://www.cbo.gov/publication/44447.