

**Statement of J. Brett Blanton**  
**Architect of the Capitol**

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**Architect of the Capitol Fiscal Year 2022 Appropriations**

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

April 21, 2021

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) 2022 budget request of \$865 million.

It has been a whirlwind year since I began my tenure as the 12th Architect of the Capitol. In that time, I have been amazed by the level of commitment and professionalism displayed by our staff. We have been in pandemic operations for nearly a year, we supported four lying in state or honor ceremonies, we survived a building breach on January 6 and we successfully prepared and supported the presidential inauguration.

As a part of the agency's FY 2021 budget request, I committed to conducting a top-down assessment of the agency to identify the most urgent needs and address the critical issues. The agency's FY 2022 budget request is the result of that review and serves as the beginning of the transformation of the AOC into a world-class service agency. Additionally, this budget request serves as the foundation for the future of the Capitol campus.

This request introduces several new initiatives that will address many of the most critical needs of the AOC and the Capitol community, including committing ourselves to long-term planning and developing strategies that will prepare the campus for the next century and begin to address the agency's \$1.8 billion backlog in strategic and systematic manner.

One of these strategies is the development of an Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) system to aid decision making regarding operating, maintaining and renewing facilities and infrastructure assets such as buildings, plants, machinery, vehicles and construction equipment in a manner that achieves industry standards and best business practices. Coupled with a commitment to better ensure our request is aligned with expected service levels, we will use EAM to proactively administer maintenance-based strategies and reduce the deferred maintenance backlog, which includes more than \$220 million in work in the Senate buildings under our care. In addition, EAM will allow us to mitigate obsolescence, restore reliability, reduce long-term costs and provide a system to forecast resource needs requirements to ensure assets are secured, maintained and meet industry standards for viability. Numerous studies have shown that the ISO 55000 certified EAM system we will implement has a return on investment of approximately five years.

This budget also reinforces my commitment to the AOC's employees by developing a human capital strategy that will bolster our efforts to acquire, develop, train and retain a talented, diverse and highly skilled workforce that is prepared for the future. We aim to transform the AOC's human capital landscape by ensuring workforce readiness, closing skills gaps and maximizing employees' talents, skill sets and competencies.

In addition, we will strengthen access to skills training by establishing a new AOC University, which will ensure people have the skills to perform their jobs well and can improve their skills to better position themselves for advancement. It will also transform the organization and culture of the AOC by investing in employee outreach and training programs that focus on skill-building

activities designed to improve employee and stakeholder experiences, teach conflict resolution skills and improve teamwork and customer service.

As I have said since my first day with the agency, the overall success of the AOC begins with our staff. The ability of our central services to support our front-line operations is critical to the organization's success. Included in this budget request is an aggressive plan to on-board needed staff who are essential toward supporting the needs and services of Congress.

The safety of members and staff on the Capitol campus is my highest priority. As such, code compliance, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), is another area where we are seeking transformative change. Under the proposed Building Official Program, dedicated experts will ensure stakeholders follow the same set of established building codes and request approval of their work through a permit process. The agency will track all construction and infrastructure work in a centralized data, management and oversight system. This proposal allows for independent verification that infrastructure and construction work performed at AOC-managed facilities and grounds consistently meets established building codes and enterprise facility standards. This is similar to the model used by many at state and local governments and will ensure safe and code-compliant work on the Capitol campus.

Additional staffing is also required to meet the emerging requirements to ensure the cleanliness of the Capitol campus as we transition to a new normal after the COVID threat. This budget request introduces the concept of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for janitorial services. These SLAs transparently outline specific levels of cleanliness and the associated cost for these services. In future budgets, we will expand these SLAs to all products and services the AOC delivers so there are measurable standards of service on the Capitol campus.

Regarding our continued COVID-19 response, our commitment toward ensuring that adequate measures are taken to mitigate the threat of COVID-19 across the Capitol campus has not been met with the required financial support. Other than our initial installment of funding, which is fully obligated, the AOC has been forced to use our critical infrastructure and security project funding to support Congress at a service level required for enhanced cleaning and acquire necessary personal protective equipment (PPE).

Maintaining vigilant and strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols, the AOC has successfully continued facility operations and delivered quality projects to Congress and our legislative and judicial branch partners. Several ongoing projects remain on-schedule, including the multi-year, multi-phase exterior stone restoration projects at the U.S. Capitol and Russell Senate Office Building. Also, as of the end of April, we have completed over 70% of the Senate moves, with 16 of the 22 offices selected in the 117th Congress moved into their renovated spaces. This effort represents the renovation of over 61,000 square feet of office space in the Russell, Dirksen and Hart Senate Office Buildings.

With the committee's encouragement, we launched the Urban Agriculture Resilience Program last spring to support food-growing programs at public gardens affected by COVID-19 and to

address emerging food insecurities due to the global pandemic. We assisted 19 states and Washington, D.C. in the growing and distribution of produce to communities with food access challenges. This model was a success, and now with lessons learned and an experienced team in partnership agreements on board at the U.S. Botanic Garden, we believe this community support can be successfully expanded to encourage more COVID gardens.

In addition to this critical work, I am proud to announce that the AOC received its 16th consecutive unmodified clean audit opinion of its financial statement. We also received our ninth consecutive Certificate of Excellence in Accountability Reporting award from the Association of Government Accountants. These recognitions are evidence of our excellence in financial management and provide transparency of our stewardship of the public's funds.

The agency's FY 2022 capital budget request seeks to continue this progress by addressing over \$78 million in deferred maintenance needs across campus to begin our process of reducing the backlog. It also invests almost \$90 million in projects that renew or improve aging infrastructure such as fire alarms, campus intrusion, environmental systems and electrical distribution.

The AOC's risk-based project prioritization process identified \$171.5 million for capital projects. Of this, \$92.7 million, or 54 percent, is for projects that did not receive funding in FY 2021. This includes the project to address identified fire and life safety deficiencies stemming from the lack of a building-wide sprinkler system to bring the U.S. Capitol into code compliance. If not funded, the building remains at increased risk of flame spread in the event of a fire. In addition, the lack of full sprinkler protection leaves the U.S. Capitol building reliant on the fire department to suppress all but the smallest fires, jeopardizing life safety as well as historic assets and features.

The agency is also requesting funding for critical utility distribution projects at the Capitol Power Plant and offsite facilities. Funding is required for Phase 5 of the Refrigeration Plant Revitalization program, which will remove 40-year-old piping and includes various replacements and additions to bring the older West Refrigeration Plant equipment up to date. Earlier this year, chilled water piping broke and spilled over 200,000 gallons of water a day, impacting servers and congressional recording studio spaces. Phase 5 of the Refrigeration Plant Revitalization is imperative to prevent a complete shutdown of various congressional operations if another pipe breaks. Off-campus, we need to replace aging units with dual-use, energy-efficient units within the data centers to reduce the risk of interruption to daily operations, reduce energy consumption and reduce our carbon footprint.

As I mentioned earlier, code compliance is an important element in this request. We are seeking to address critical upgrades to life safety systems across campus. Fire alarm and sprinkler system upgrades at the U.S. Capitol, U.S. Botanic Garden and the James Madison Memorial Building will address code deficiencies, reduce the risk of system failure and improve facility safety for building occupants.

I would also like to mention the continued need to address a growing backlog of work at the aging Library of Congress facilities. Stained-glass window and roof repairs at the Thomas Jefferson Building are long overdue, and the failure to properly address water infiltration stemming from the James Madison Memorial Building's sixth floor terrace poses a threat to the historical collections housed in this facility.

Finally, as we continue to assess the Capitol's future facility needs in the aftermath of the January sixth breach, I would also like to take a moment to thank the subcommittee for your support of a campus-wide facility assessment. This assessment will identify necessary security upgrades to the facilities and infrastructure on Capitol Hill through coordination and collaboration with campus partners. It will evaluate options, and the engineering requirements necessary to accomplish those options, to provide the committee with budget-level details needed to make decisions on potential project and resource needs. This assessment is underway and I expect to have initial information to you in the coming weeks.

During my selection and confirmation process, I promised to transform the AOC. This budget request is the first step in that transformation. Additionally, last year, I promised to emphasize deferred maintenance and emergent needs required for our facilities. I am confident that this request, coupled with the changes we are actively incorporating throughout the agency, represents a major step forward and the beginning of the future for the AOC.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of our FY 2022 budget request.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer your questions.