March 24, 2023

The Honorable Mark Amodei  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch  
House Appropriations Committee  
104 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Adriano Espaillat  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch  
House Appropriations Committee  
2332 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Amodei and Ranking Member Espaillat,

As you consider the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Legislative Branch appropriations bill, we respectfully request funding be maintained at FY 2023 levels to ensure that interns compensated through the House intern allowance are able to be paid a livable wage.

We applaud the committee’s work last year to raise funding for intern compensation from the FY22 levels of $35,000 per office to the FY23 levels of $46,800 per office. Maintaining this funding level compensates the thousands of students and recent graduates who come to Capitol Hill to learn about and serve in Congress. The District of Columbia is frequently ranked in the top 10 most expensive cities in the U.S., making an unpaid or low-paying internship an insurmountable hurdle for far too many would-be applicants.

According to a March 2021 report from the nonprofit Pay Our Interns, the average total stipend per intern was $1,612.53 in the House, which is insufficient to cover living and working expenses in the Washington D.C. area. Unpaid and low-paying internships severely limit opportunities for those who want to serve but who cannot afford to take these positions. The same report found that people of color are significantly underrepresented in paid internships in the House, comprising just 23% of all paid interns. These numbers reflect the reality that underpaying interns is a disproportionate barrier for people of color seeking internship and career opportunities in the House.

For offices that offer full-time internship opportunities throughout the year, the total amount appropriated for the House intern account, as well as the monthly $1,800 cap on the amount offices are able to compensate interns, limits the ability of offices to compensate their interns with a living wage.

Furthermore, the current inability to move any funds from the Member's Representational Allowance (MRA) into the intern fund inhibits an office’s ability to supplement their intern funds in a way that does not count against their payroll headcount cap. Many offices currently use the MRA to pay some interns, but each fairly-paid intern takes a slot that could be allocated to staff, shared staff, and caucus dues, thus limiting the number of interns payable under such an arrangement. By seeding the intern pay fund with MRA funds, we will be more able to compensate all interns for their work.
We encourage investigation into both the monthly cap on intern pay and the ability to transfer funds from the MRA into the intern allowance, in the hopes that we will be able to offer our interns fairer pay that does not interact with headcount concerns.

From appropriators, we respectfully request that the funding allowance for interns in FY 2024 be set at no less than $46,800 in a calendar year for House offices. This will ensure that all House offices will be able to compensate one full-time intern and one part-time intern working 50% of the time year-round each at a wage of $15 per hour.

The support provided by interns to Members and their staff is critical to the smooth functioning of House offices. Additionally, Congress bears a responsibility to make internships, the first foray into public service for many people, an accessible, affordable opportunity for all, regardless of background. For these reasons, we urge the Subcommittee to provide sufficient funds for House interns to earn a livable wage, which will help to make Congressional internships an attractive and feasible option for a more diverse pool of applicants.

We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress

Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress

Rick Larsen
Member of Congress

Chrissy Houlahan
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