

Statement of Valerie Bailey Grasso
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(CREA), IFPTE Local 75

Submitted to the Subcommittee on the
Legislative Branch, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of
Representatives,

on

CRS Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Budget Requests

March 6, 2015

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz and
Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Valerie Grasso and I am the President of the Congressional Research Employees Association (CREA). CREA is the exclusive representative of all bargaining unit employees at the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CREA represents approximately 500 bargaining unit members employed by CRS, of whom over half are currently dues-paying members. We are analysts, attorneys, librarians, information professionals and other personnel who support Members and committees of Congress. On behalf of all of our members, I thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony for the record regarding the Library's FY2016 budget.

In support of the statutory requirement of responding, without partisan bias, to the needs of the Members and committees of Congress, CRS has requested an increase of \$1.087 million, which includes \$820,000 for salaries and benefits; \$250,000 for external contract support; and \$17,000 for professional training and development. Included in salaries and expenses is certain funding

for six additional full-time equivalents (FTE) of staffing expertise to expand CRS's current policy portfolio in the areas of health care data analysis and research.

In his testimony to the Committee this year, the Librarian of Congress stated: "We will need in the near future more flexibility in hiring an expert staff – not just for this Library but for the country. The erosion of basic funding is already compromising our ability to deliver high-quality knowledge resources to the Congress and the American People."

There are two areas that CREA believes require your attention: capturing and maintaining the CRS institutional memory that exists in its seasoned veteran employee group, particularly those with 30-40 years of CRS tenure and who are eligible to retire at any time; and increasing the degree of workplace flexibility that CRS employees are afforded to perform their duties in service to Congress.

At CRS, the future is now. Nowhere is the loss of talent and expertise felt more than in the ranks of CRS employees. From the inside, it appears that CRS is losing its expertise faster than it can be replaced. The loss of veteran staff and the limited hiring of seasoned experts have resulted in some cases where certain critical areas of expertise upon which Congress relies are thinly staffed or one-deep, with no back-up analyst. In some areas, critical expertise has never been replaced. Health care, for which CRS has requested additional resources, is just one example. Another example is in the area of national defense. One national defense budget specialist (one of three specialists) passed away in 2012 and was never replaced. Additionally, one of the remaining two specialists is planning to retire soon.

According to the Library's annual reports, staffing levels at CRS have dropped from 651 employees in FY2007 to 593 employees in FY2013. While some employees are retiring, others leave for a

variety of reasons, among them to seek jobs with better workplace flexibilities.

It is notable that CRS management has made a decision in recent years to stop hiring senior-level specialists who directly provide to Congress the highest level of expertise in critical policy areas, under Title 2 U.S.C. 166(e). Instead, CRS has reserved these senior-level positions for managers and certain former managers. CREA regrets this decision to cease hiring senior specialists and to cease promoting high-performing analysts to become senior specialists. CREA sees this now-unused authority as a critical tool for attracting and retaining CRS' most expert analysts.

While CRS management has asked employees to be more flexible and remain more accessible to Congress, they have not always accorded reciprocal flexibility to employees. This Subcommittee was instrumental in bringing telework to CRS, for which CRS employees are very grateful. Telework has enhanced CRS' ability to serve Congress. However, additional flexibility is needed.

CREA and CRS have recently reached agreement for a one-year pilot program that allows employees to earn and carry over up to 12 credit hours. By contrast, employees in the rest of the Library of Congress may earn up to 24 credit hours in a pay period. Credit hours are requested by employees to complete work assignments for Congress, when completion of the assignments would necessitate working beyond the normal work hours. Even with the advent of the pilot program, some managers are reportedly denying employee requests to earn credit hours, and in some sections of CRS, employees are discouraged from even asking for approval. CREA is concerned that newer employees begin their life at CRS with limited ability to take medical and other leave and thus have a limited ability to cope with illnesses and other family matters. Credit hours pose no additional financial burden on the Library or CRS, and will help CRS compete for and retain new talent. New employees should not be afraid to ask for, and within reason,

should be granted the use of credit hours without artificial barriers being put in place.

As workplace flexibility is increasingly available in the executive branch and elsewhere, CRS has seen employees who bring substantial expertise to Congress leave.

As President of CREA, thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the analysts, attorneys, librarians, information professionals, and other areas of research support.

Valerie Bailey Grasso

Valerie Grasso was elected as President of the Congressional Research Employees Association (CREA) in October 2014. She has been employed with the Library of Congress since 1984. Ms. Grasso is a Specialist in Defense Acquisition in the CRS Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade Division. Her portfolio includes defense contract policy, competitive sourcing, sole-source contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan, international procurement, and strategic and critical materials. She holds degrees from Georgetown University (BA), Howard University (MSW), and the National Defense University, Industrial College of the Armed Forces (MS).