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May 3, 2023

Dr. Carla Hayden, Librarian of Congress
Library of Congress
101 Independence Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20540

Transmitted via Email

Re: Congressional Research Service 2022 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey

Dear Dr. Hayden:

We write to you as the Executive Officers of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), the parent union of the Congressional Research Employees Association-IFPTE Local 75 (CREA), the union representing the employees of the Congressional Research Service (CRS). We are contacting you about troubling trends in CRS employees' views of CRS senior leadership revealed by the 2022 U.S. Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). We understand the Library uses the results of the FEVS to identify systemic problems in the Library and in its service units, so that they can be addressed productively and constructively. In that spirit, IFPTE and CREA request an opportunity to meet with you to discuss issues with CRS senior leaders identified by the FEVS survey and further expanded on in CREA surveys of CRS employees.

Regrettably, many of these issues are not new, and were identified in a 2019 oversight hearing by the Committee on House Administration (CHA) and further highlighted in a recent CHA Modernization subcommittee hearing on April 26, 2023. Some of the most pressing concerns raised by the FEVS results and a post-FEVS CREA survey include attrition and morale, a lack of a commitment to diversity and inclusion, poor communication by CRS leadership, and an overall lack of confidence and trust in CRS's senior leaders.

Attrition and Morale

CRS's most valuable resource is its people. Unfortunately, an increasing number of them are choosing to leave the Service. In FY2022, there were 44 non-retirement voluntary separations (excluding those employees who moved to other areas of the Library). This is more than double the rate observed between FY2009

and FY2021 where the average number of annual separations was 21. When CRS loses experienced and knowledgeable staff so rapidly, the agency's ability to serve Congress suffers and in turn, the Library suffers. CRS's ultimate product for Congress is advanced knowledge. If CRS cannot retain personnel with expert-level knowledge, then CRS will be of less and less use to Congress.

The accelerated attrition rate observed in FY2022 may be just the beginning. Many CRS employees express high levels of frustration and dissatisfaction with CRS's workplace flexibilities in contrast to the Library's policies, and data shows these policies have contributed to attrition. In a CREA survey of employees who recently left CRS, 78.3% cited the telework policy as a very or somewhat important factor in their decision to leave, with 43.5% stating that they would have stayed if CRS had implemented more flexible telework policies. The FEVS data matches these results, with *almost half of CRS employees (48.9%) stating that they were considering leaving their position* because of CRS's telework policy, compared to only 29.6% of all Library employees.¹

The FEVS data indicates many CRS employees are dissatisfied with the Service's telework policy, which is more restrictive than the Library's policy. Only 26.7% of CRS employees agreed that their hybrid work arrangement was "fair in accounting for employees diverse needs and situations," with more than twice that number (58.0%) believing it to be unfair.² The results for the Library as a whole are a mirror image, with 56.7% believing the Library's telework policy to be fair, and only 26.4% finding it unfair.³ A similar divide between CRS and the Library can be seen in views on senior leadership's support for work-life balance programs, with a majority of Library employees (56.3%) agreeing that leaders supported such programs but only 36.4% of CRS employees agreeing.⁴

While work-life policies are a factor in attrition rates, a main driver of attrition appears to be low morale. FEVS reveals large drops in various measures of CRS employees' morale between 2018 and 2022. These sharp decreases in dissatisfaction are not seen in the Library as a whole. (Notably, the Library-wide results *include* the responses of CRS employees, meaning that the divergence between the Library excluding CRS and CRS are generally understated in these comparisons.) While Library employees' stated satisfaction "considering everything" *increased* between 2018 and 2022, overall satisfaction for CRS employees dropped from 66.6% to 50.9%.⁵ Similarly, CRS employees' satisfaction with their involvement in decisions that affected their work dropped from 54.3% in 2018 to just 34.8% in 2022.⁶

¹ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation, at p. 15 (CRS FEVS results question #91; LOC FEVS results question #91).

² CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 13 (CRS FEVS results question #92).

³ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 13 (LOC FEVS results question #92).

⁴ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 12 (LOC FEVS results question #61; CRS FEVS results question #61).

⁵ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 22 (CRS FEVS results question #70; LOC FEVS results question #70).

⁶ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 20 (CRS FEVS results question #65).

The morale drop in CRS was especially pronounced when CRS employees were asked specifically about senior leaders in their service unit. While a strong majority of CRS employees (57.6%) agreed that senior leaders generated high levels of motivation and commitment in 2018, that number had more than halved by 2022 (23.5%).⁷ Strikingly, the number of CRS employees who disagreed with this statement *increased by nearly 300%* between 2018 and 2022 (from 14.9% to 59.4%).⁸ The comparable measures for all Library employees remained roughly stable, suggesting the morale drop and loss of motivation from senior leaders is limited to CRS.

It is difficult to overstate the seriousness of the morale crisis at CRS. Some of it is due to burnout as a result of the loss of experienced colleagues and a hiring process that can take upwards of nine months to replace them. CREA’s survey reveals that many employees felt that increased attrition had left CRS “short staffed,” contributed to burnout, created “extra work” for “those who have given CRS a chance and stayed,” and opened “major gaps in our subject matter expertise.” As several employees noted in their responses, “[FEVS] confirms what many of us expected—there are systemic and widespread morale problems.” Another employee observed that the “FEVS survey results indicate that there are serious problems with CRS senior management,” while another characterized the FEVS results as “abominable, damning to our senior management/leadership, and, unfortunately, entirely expected.” In the opinion of some employees, “CRS senior management has permanently lost its credibility with much of CRS staff.”

Many CRS staff report that the way senior leaders treat CRS staff makes them feel devalued and disrespected. For example, a high proportion of CRS employees do not believe that CRS senior leaders support policies to protect employee health and safety. In 2018, 77.6% of CRS employees agreed that they “are protected from health and safety hazards on the job.” By 2022, that number had declined to 50.9%, while the number who disagreed *quintupled* from 5.9% to 31.7%.⁹ In 2022, only 46.6% of CRS employees agreed that senior leaders “support policies and procedures to protect employee health and safety,” with 34.2% disagreeing.¹⁰ The comparable numbers for the Library as a whole are 70.6% agreement and 15.0% disagreement.¹¹

Equally important, the “dismissive” way that CRS senior leaders handled the return to onsite operations, telework negotiations with CREA, and summarily rejected CREA’s requests to reconsider the suitability of positions for increased telework has undermined employee morale. Over and over, employees responding to CREA’s survey repeated that management’s “cavalier” and “generally disrespectful” communication on these issues had “sent the message . . . that they

⁷ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 9 (CRS FEVS results question #55).

⁸ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 9 (CRS FEVS results question #55).

⁹ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 10 (CRS FEVS results question #36).

¹⁰ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 11 (CRS FEVS results question #94).

¹¹ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 11 (LOC FEVS results question #94). The divergence between CRS and other Library employees suggest that these health and safety fears relate to CRS policies and communications (e.g., on telework and the return onsite), rather than common external events such as those of January 6, 2021.

do not value CRS employees”; showed a “complete disregard for employee satisfaction, health, and safety”; displayed “little regard for employee satisfaction”; and made employees feel “unvalued” and “replaceable.” Even employees who are satisfied with their level of telework were troubled by the “palpable disdain” displayed by CRS senior management. The message received by CRS employees was that CRS senior leaders “do not trust us or respect us,” “do not care about their employees’ well-being,” and “clearly do[] not (and perhaps never did) value employee satisfaction, health, or safety.”

Diversity and Inclusion

CRS employees’ high level of dissatisfaction with senior leadership extends to other important areas, including diversity and inclusion. Library employees strongly believe that management practices promote diversity, with about three times as many Library employees agreeing than disagreeing with that statement (58.9% to 19.6%).¹² In contrast, only a plurality (43.7%) of CRS employees agree that management practices promote diversity, with almost a third disagreeing.¹³ Perhaps relatedly, the percentage of CRS employees who agreed that arbitrary action and favoritism were not tolerated at the Library fell from 61.9% to 50.2% between 2018 and 2022.¹⁴

In 2019, CHA commented upon CRS’s lack of diversity. After asking about this issue in the oversight hearing, Rep. Pete Aguilar observed, “[CRS] needs to redouble their efforts, recruit and retain a more diverse senior staff that’s reflective of the country we all represent.”¹⁵ The survey results show that many CRS staff do not feel the Service has heeded this call.

A majority of respondents to CREA’s survey (58.8%) considered greater diversity in CRS as among the most important issues that management should address. In CREA’s view, troubling comments by CRS employees underscore that the Service has far to go on these issues. Senior leaders, in particular, need to do more to support diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Service. Employees stated that “CRS Senior Management is not committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment. They say they are, but the results of CRS hiring are not reflective of the U.S. population.” Another employee felt “less safe because of the lack of diversity at CRS,” noting that they “haven’t met an analyst or specialist or someone in management that looks like me or that I can relate to because we are of the same ethnicity and cultural background.” Still another employee found troubling disparities “in subtle but noticed ways . . . between work from women and minority analysts vs. white male analysts (whose work often gets through review with less questions and more easily).”

In a CREA survey, some employees singled out senior leadership for insufficiently supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion at CRS. One observed that “[r]epeated comments by top leadership regarding diversity and equity at CRS reveal pervasive,

¹² CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 16 (LOC results question #71).

¹³ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 16 (CRS results question #71).

¹⁴ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 17 (CRS FEVS results question #42).

¹⁵ Hearing on Congressional Research Service Zeroes in on Diversity Issue, *Roll Call*, June 20, 2019, <https://rollcall.com/2019/06/20/hearing-on-congressional-research-service-zeroes-in-on-diversity-issue/>.

systemic issues that have caused me and many others to question whether we can continue serving at this agency in good conscience, having heard the way our director speaks about these issues.”

At the 2023 CHA Modernization subcommittee hearing, the Director acknowledged that the composition of the CRS workforce remains “approximately 75% Caucasian, 25% minority.” According to the Director, CRS could only “move the needle” on increasing staff diversity quickly with *more attrition*, despite the record high levels in FY2022.

Poor Communication

Poor communication by senior management and the lack of an employee voice in decision-making has been an ongoing issue for CRS. During the 2019 CHA oversight hearing, Committee Chair Rep. Zoe Lofgren observed in her opening statement that, “although the Congressional Research Employees Association represents more than 80 percent of the CRS workforce, a common refrain is their exclusion from management decisions. By ignoring them and their learned experiences at CRS, management, I believe is doing a disservice to both itself and its employees. At CRS, the workforce must be involved in the decision-making and the direction-setting of the Service. The bargaining unit should be consulted when actions are being considered that will directly impact them and their work. Management should listen to the concerns of the employees.”¹⁶ Despite the committee’s advice, management has not improved communication or engagement with CRS employees.

CRS employees are generally dissatisfied with communications from management. In 2018, about half (50.3%) of CRS employees were satisfied with the information they received from management about their service unit, almost exactly the same level of satisfaction as Library employees overall (50.0%). As on other measures, CRS and Library employees’ views had diverged sharply by 2022. For CRS, satisfaction with management’s communication fell to 33.0% by 2022, with a plurality (43.5%) expressing dissatisfaction with CRS management’s communication.¹⁷ In contrast, for Library employees as a whole, satisfaction with communication by management rose between 2018 and 2022 (50.0% to 51.8%).¹⁸ CRS employees were also much more dissatisfied than Library employees with communications about the return to onsite operations. While an overwhelming majority of Library employees thought that senior leaders provided effective communications on this key issue (72.0%), less than half of CRS employees (46.4%) agreed that their senior leaders had done so.¹⁹

CRS senior leadership doesn’t regularly or effectively communicate with staff in general or about the rationales for its decisions in particular. Three-quarters of respondents to CREA’s survey considered improved communication by

¹⁶ Oversight of the Congressional Research Service, Hearing Before the House Committee on House Administration, 116th Congress, June 20, 2019, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-116hrg38531/pdf/CHRG-116hrg38531.pdf>.

¹⁷ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 19 (CRS FEVS results question #66).

¹⁸ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 19 (LOC FEVS results question #66).

¹⁹ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 14 (LOC and CRS FEVS results question #95).

management as a key area that senior management should address. Employees repeatedly criticized what they viewed as “unilateral,” “disconnected,” or “dismissive” communications from management. Several noted that it was “deeply troubling” that there “is little dialogue here at CRS between our top management and staff”—the “minimal, if any, communication from senior management feels like [employee] concerns are being dismissed.” Others felt that communications from CRS senior leaders to employees showed a “blatant disregard for evidence,” and “disdain for the input of [CRS] employees.” CREA believes that CRS senior leaders should instead “listen to and accept [employee] concerns” and “treat employees with respect.”

It may be unsurprising, therefore, that with limited and poor communication from management, many CRS staff have expressed that they have little confidence that decisions are being made in a way that prioritizes Congress’s needs.

Lack of Confidence and Trust in CRS Senior Leadership

Many CRS employees lack confidence that CRS senior leadership makes decisions in a manner that prioritizes the needs of Congress. Senior leadership has moved forward with policies that seem to be at odds with the Service’s mission. Senior leadership rarely solicits, accepts offers of, or acts on input into its decision making. As previously discussed, many CRS employees found CRS management to be unwilling to engage in a meaningful and respectful discussion on creating a flexible work environment that fostered the highest level of service to Congress.

Most recently, CRS management has proposed changing the job performance appraisal process for legislative attorneys to require attorneys to do a uniform, quantitative amount of work—e.g., answer a certain number of Congressional phone calls, send a certain number of emails, do a certain number of seminars, and write a certain number of written products—in order to be classified as “fully successful.” At no point during the discussion of this proposal have CRS management articulated how these quotas would improve service to Congress. Management maintains that such quotas will have no deleterious effects on service to Congress or on the quality of attorneys’ work, even after CRS attorneys and analysts have repeatedly identified that proposed output quotas would significantly harm CRS’s service to Congress. For example, they could lead management to shift an attorney from congressionally requested consultative work to unrequested written work if they have not met their writing target, and they could encourage attorneys to write in areas where they have limited expertise and/or write more superficial products to meet their writing target.

The response of senior leadership often seems designed to give the appearance of action rather than to actually address the problems, and, perhaps as a result, they consistently fail to meet the moment. CRS’s leaders regularly convene working groups on various issues with little to show for them. CRS employees regularly commit their time to working groups with the stated purpose of creating successful and sustained strategies to improve diversity and inclusion at CRS, modernizing our product types, or addressing the technology needs of staff. These efforts, however, appear to be “checking the box” exercises, with CRS’s leadership appear reluctant to engage in meaningful dialogue with CRS staff and take actions that

actually solve our agency's very real problems, make CRS a better place to work, and ultimately improve our service to Congress.

Many of the problems described above and highlighted by the FEVS results are specific to CRS senior leadership. CRS employees' negative views of senior management are not seen in the comparable questions about their other colleagues and direct supervisors. On the contrary, CRS employees had strongly positive views of their immediate supervisors: 82.8% felt that their supervisor was doing a good or very good job; 87.6% felt their supervisor treated them with respect; and 88.7% felt their supervisor supported their work-life balance.²⁰ As for their co-workers, about 90% of CRS employees had positive views and 94.1% felt their co-workers produced high-quality work.²¹ In sum, CRS employees retained strongly positive views of their colleagues and supervisors (but not senior leaders) in 2022, while Library employees on the whole had starkly more positive views of senior leaders than did CRS employees. It is therefore difficult to dismiss the negative results for CRS senior leadership as based on some wider circumstance (e.g., the stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic). The concerning negative trends appear to focus on CRS senior leadership specifically, including—though not limited to—their communication and handling of the return to onsite operations and the telework policy.

Conclusion

CRS is a special institution with a singular mission, and CREA is deeply concerned that the problems described here and discussed in the both the 2019 CHA oversight hearing and 2023 CHA Modernization subcommittee hearing will impede our ability to fulfill it. As Chairwoman Bice stated at the 2023 hearing: "There are many talented and dedicated staffers within CRS who do incredible work for Congress. And members and staff would suffer without their work. What concerns me when we hear about persistent culture and morale issues that appear to be unaddressed is that they risk undermining CRS's ability to retain their most valuable asset: the hundreds of analysts, attorneys, and research librarians that support Congress's work." Or as one survey respondent wrote, "This is a five-alarm fire that requires intervention."

It is especially notable that CRS was the only legislative support agency to not be ranked in the top 10 of its size class in 2022 as one of the best places to work in the federal government based on FEVS results. By contrast, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), our sister agencies, were ranked number one in their respective size classes.²² The Library (which includes CRS) was only ranked 15 out of 27 in midsize agencies; were CRS ranked separately, it would have almost certainly ranked even lower.

²⁰ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 7 (CRS FEVS results questions #47, 49, 52).

²¹ CREA FEVS 2022 Presentation at p. 6 (CRS FEVS results questions #15, 21).

²² 2022 Best Places to Work in the Federal Government Rankings, *Partnership for Public Service*, <https://bestplacestowork.org/rankings/>. While CRS was not separately ranked as a subcomponent of the Library, the Library ranked 15 of 27 mid-sized agencies, and CRS employees expressed lower levels of satisfaction than other Library employees in the 2022 FEVS.

CREA has attempted to address these concerns with senior leadership directly but has encountered the same kinds of challenges as reflected in the FEVS and CREA survey results. Accordingly, IPFTE and CREA respectfully request the opportunity to meet with you at a mutually convenient time to further discuss these concerns and help identify ways to ensure CRS can continue to provide the exceptional level of service Congress has come to expect and which it deserves.

Sincerely,



Matthew S. Biggs
IFPTE President



Gay Henson
IFPTE Secretary-Treasurer

CC:

Dr. Mary B. Mazanec
Director, Congressional Research Service
101 Independence Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20540

Attachment:

CREA FEVS Presentation to Bargaining Unit Employees

