



**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS
FOR THE RECORD**

Following a Hearing on
**The Congressional Budget Office's
Request for Appropriations for
Fiscal Year 2025**

Conducted by the
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives

On April 10, 2024, the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch of the House Committee on Appropriations convened a hearing at which Phillip L. Swagel, the Congressional Budget Office's Director, testified about the agency's appropriation request for fiscal year 2025.¹ After the hearing, Congressman LaTurner submitted questions for the record. This document provides CBO's answers. It is available at www.cbo.gov/publication/60236.

Boosting Outreach

Question. Mr. Swagel, when we met a few weeks ago, you indicated that CBO's requested increase is entirely for personnel-related expenses, including hiring nine new staff members.

Can you outline your vision for boosting outreach to Congressional staff and the media—and the role that additional staff would provide in that effort?

Answer. Of the nine new staff members that CBO is requesting for fiscal year 2025, one would be devoted to boosting outreach to Congressional staff and the press. That person would assist in a broad strategy to do the following:

- Enhance the outreach by CBO, especially at the start of each new Congress. The CBO Director and agency staff members regularly conduct outreach to Congressional committees and personal offices of Members of Congress to explain the agency's work, respond to questions, learn Members' interests, and solicit feedback. (In 2023, for example, the Director met with hundreds of Members either individually or in groups.) At the start of a Congress, there is a particular focus on that outreach, as part of the agency's efforts to identify legislative priorities and issues on the horizon, in addition to making the Congress aware of CBO as a resource. An additional staff member would enable the agency to do more of that outreach, particularly with personal offices.
- Find innovative ways to keep the Congress and public informed of CBO's work. Earlier this year, the agency launched a quarterly email newsletter, *CBO's Quarter in Review*, which is a roundup of the agency's most

recent publications and cost estimates in an accessible HTML format. CBO will continue to enhance such communications with the Congress and public, aiming to send more frequent email newsletters. An additional staff member would bolster that effort as well as the ongoing priority of looking to inform the Congress and the public better.

- Provide forums to learn about CBO's work. CBO's staff give presentations on Capitol Hill—some in collaboration with Congressional committees and the Congressional Research Service—about CBO's budget and economic projections and other topics. Those presentations allow CBO to explain its work and answer questions. An additional staff member would help organize more such presentations.

Making Cost Estimates More Understandable

Question. At the Legislative Branch hearing last year, we talked briefly about CBO's ability to answer questions about its cost estimates and modeling, and CBO's goal of increased transparency through additional materials supporting CBO's baseline projections and cost estimates.

What specific steps are you taking or do you plan to take to make your cost estimates more comprehensible for Congressional offices?

Answer. Over the past few years, CBO has undertaken several projects to enhance the clarity of its cost estimates, and the agency plans to build on those endeavors. Those projects primarily focused on reorganizing the contents of published cost estimates to emphasize, on the first page, key summary information about the bill's budgetary effects. This summer, CBO will begin posting that key information in HTML format, making it easier for staff to view it on their computers and mobile devices. In addition, the agency will continue to enhance the information it provides about how it prepares its cost estimates, focusing on explaining key assumptions and areas of uncertainty.

Besides those efforts, CBO has published three budget primers since April 2023 to help Congressional staff understand the federal budget process and the agency's role in preparing cost estimates:

- *CBO Describes Its Cost-Estimating Process*—The Congressional Budget Act requires CBO to prepare

1. See the testimony of Phillip L. Swagel, Director, Congressional Budget Office, before the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch of the House Committee on Appropriations, *The Congressional Budget Office's Request for Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025* (April 10, 2024), www.cbo.gov/publication/60002.

estimates of the cost of legislation at certain points in the legislative process. This primer describes how the agency prepares cost estimates.

- *CBO Explains How It Estimates Savings From Rescissions*—Rescissions are provisions of law that cancel budget authority previously provided to federal agencies before it would otherwise expire. The Congress can use rescissions, along with other legislative tools, to reduce federal spending. CBO provides estimates of the budgetary effects of proposed rescissions to support the Congress in enforcing budget rules. To produce those estimates, CBO considers several factors, which this primer explains.

- *CBO Explains Its Principles for Identifying Mandates in Legislation*—As required by the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995, CBO examines some of the effects of federal legislation on state, local, and tribal governments and on private-sector entities by identifying what that act defines as mandates. This primer describes the principles that the agency follows to identify mandates in legislation.

CBO will ensure that its budget primers remain up to date and address the emerging needs of Congressional staff who are less familiar with the agency's cost estimates.