Office of Congressional Workplace Rights

Press Release

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OFFICE OF CONGRESSIONAL WORKPLACE RIGHTS ISSUES ACCESSIBILITY REPORT ON CAPITOL HILL BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

Washington, DC – The Capitol complex is more accessible to visitors and staff members with disabilities, according to a new report by the Office of Congressional Workplace Rights (OCWR).

The OCWR – an independent, non-partisan office that enforces public access laws in the legislative branch – reports that significant improvements have been made to legislative branch facilities to better comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as applied by the Congressional Accountability Act (CAA) of 1995.

"We found many of the spaces most frequented by the public were accessible," said OCWR General Counsel John D. Uelmen. "As popular attractions for visitors to Capitol Hill and those seeking a firsthand view of the legislative process, it was critical for us to ensure these facilities were accessible to all.

The *114th Congress Biennial Report on Americans with Disabilities Act Inspections Relating to Public Services and Accommodations* covers a two-year inspection period with a focus on House and Senate Office buildings. The report notes improvements made over the past several years and identifies current barriers to access. The report also highlights the cooperative efforts of the Architect of the Capitol (AOC), Senate and House leadership, and other legislative branch offices, in removing barriers to access.

The report, which was released Oct.11, shows a relatively few number of barriers in Member offices, and many of those found were easy to correct. For example, where literature in an office reception area was placed too high or too low for someone in a wheelchair to reach, the literature could easily be moved to an acceptable height or placed in a different area.

However, there are important areas that still need improvement. For example, inspectors found a high number of barriers in other frequently visited public spaces, such as multi-user restrooms.

"Still, I am confident that we are headed in the right direction toward increased accessibility," Mr. Uelmen said. "This is due in large part to the work we have done to educate employing offices about how to achieve accessibility."

The OCWR, which carries out some of the same ADA public access enforcement responsibilities in the legislative branch as the Justice Department does in the executive branch and private sector, is required by law to inspect and report on the Capitol grounds and facilities. It is also mandated to conduct training and education programs. As part of this mandate, the OCWR created a video tutorial on office accessibility and developed a tip sheet for improving office accessibility for employing offices. The

OCWR also works closely with employing offices to provide technical guidance on prioritizing accessibility.

The report also previews results of the 115th Congress ADA inspections, which focused on the Capitol Visitor Center, the House and Senate cafeterias and gift shops, and the Library of Congress facilities. The trend of improved accessibility has continued.

In addition to the OCWR's public access inspections, the OCWR also inspects legislative branch facilities for safety and health standards.

The CAA requires Congress and legislative branch entities to follow many of the same employment and workplace safety laws applied to private businesses and the executive branch. The OCWR Board of Directors has adopted ADA public access regulations for legislative branch offices covered by the CAA that mirror those currently applied to entities covered by Titles II and III of the ADA. The OCWR awaits congressional approval of its ADA regulations adopted in February 2016.

For more information about the OCWR, please visit ocwr.gov and follow us on social media. (Twitter: @Legbranch_OCWR; Instagram: OCWR_Legbranch; LinkedIn: OfficeofCongressionalWorkplaceRights)