



ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

## **Managing Congressional Constituent Service Inquiries**

### **Committee on Administration and Management**

#### **Draft Recommendation for Committee | March 28, 2024**

1           Since the country’s earliest years, constituent services have been a cornerstone of the  
2 representational activities of members of Congress. Thousands of people each year turn to their  
3 elected representatives for help in accessing federal programs and navigating administrative  
4 processes. Constituent services, or “casework,” also plays an important role in congressional  
5 oversight of executive-branch agencies, allowing members to gain greater awareness of the  
6 operation and performance of federal programs.

7           Today, every member of Congress employs “caseworkers,” both in Washington, D.C.,  
8 and in local offices, who help constituents with requests ranging from the simple, such as  
9 assistance with government forms, to the complex, such as correcting errors in veterans’ service  
10 records. While nearly all agencies receive congressional casework requests, the most frequently  
11 contacted include the Department of Veterans Affairs, Internal Revenue Service, Social Security  
12 Administration, Department of State, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.<sup>1</sup>

13           Agencies, especially those that receive a large volume of casework requests, have  
14 developed practices for receiving, processing, and responding to requests and interacting with  
15 congressional caseworkers. There is significant variation in these practices across a number of  
16 dimensions.

17           Organizationally, for example, some agencies assign responsibility for managing  
18 casework requests to a centralized congressional liaison office, while others assign that

---

<sup>1</sup> See Sean Kealy, Congressional Constituent Service Inquiries 23 (Mar. 25, 2024) (draft report to the Admin. Conf. of the U.S.).



## ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

19 responsibility to regional offices and staff that are empowered to work directly with caseworkers  
20 located in members' state or district offices.

21 Technologically, some agencies continue to use ad hoc, legacy systems to manage  
22 casework requests, while others are adopting new technologies like internal electronic case  
23 management systems<sup>2</sup> and public-facing, web-based portals<sup>3</sup> to improve the efficiency, accuracy,  
24 and transparency of their management and resolution of requests.

25 Procedurally, many agencies have developed standard operating procedures (SOPs) for  
26 managing casework requests and made them available to caseworkers and the public. SOPs vary  
27 widely in their content, scope, and level of detail. Some agencies have further produced  
28 handbooks and other informational materials like flowcharts and plain language summaries of  
29 their SOPs to educate and assist caseworkers.

30 Agencies are also subject to differing legal and regulatory requirements that affect when,  
31 how, and what agency staff can communicate to congressional caseworkers in furtherance of a  
32 constituent request. These legal and regulatory requirements, including the Privacy Act of 1974,  
33 the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, and agency-specific rules and  
34 guidance, typically bar agencies from sharing records or information that contain protected or  
35 personally identifiable information with congressional caseworkers unless the constituent  
36 provides an executed expression of consent.<sup>4</sup>

37 Recognizing the unique and important role that constituent services play in agency-  
38 congressional relations and congressional oversight of federal programs, this Recommendation  
39 offers best practices to help agencies promote quality, efficiency, transparency, and timeliness in  
40 their management and resolution of congressional casework requests. Of course, agencies

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Admin. Conf. of the U.S., Recommendation 2018-3, *Electronic Case Management in Federal Administrative Adjudication*, 83 Fed. Reg. 30,686 (June 29, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Admin. Conf. of the U.S., Recommendation 2023-4, *Online Process in Agency Adjudication*, 88 Fed. Reg. 42,682 (July 3, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> See Kealy *supra* note 1, at 10.



## ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

41 receive different volumes of casework requests, serve different communities, have different  
42 operational needs, and different resources available to them. This Recommendation recognizes  
43 that, when adopting or reviewing practices for receiving, managing, and responding to requests  
44 and interacting with congressional caseworkers, agencies should tailor these best practices to the  
45 unique circumstances of the programs they administer.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

#### **Adopting Standard Operating Procedures**

- 46 1. Agencies, especially those that receive a large volume of congressional casework  
47 requests, should develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) for managing such  
48 requests. Topics that SOPs should address include, as appropriate:
- 49 a. The agency office(s) or personnel responsible for receiving, processing, and  
50 responding to congressional casework requests and interacting with congressional  
51 caseworkers, and the responsibilities of the office(s) or personnel;
  - 52 b. The procedure by which congressional caseworkers should submit casework  
53 requests to the agency, including any releases, waivers, or other documentation  
54 required by law;
  - 55 c. The structure and operation of casework request workflows employed by agency  
56 personnel while receiving, processing, and responding to requests, including any  
57 intra-agency assignments of responsibility for the preparation, review, and  
58 approval of draft responses;
  - 59 d. Communications that the agency provides to congressional caseworkers upon  
60 receiving a casework request, while processing a request, and in responding to the  
61 request, including any legal requirements that restrict the agency's ability to  
62 provide information to a congressional caseworker;
  - 63 e. Any circumstances in which certain casework requests will be prioritized and how  
64 the agency's management of prioritized requests differs from its handling of other  
65 requests;

**Commented [CD1]: For Committee Discussion:**  
(1) Should the recommendation address communications and interactions between agency casework officials and program/adjudicatory officials.  
(2) Should the recommendation address interactions between agency ombuds and congressional case workers to avoid duplication and otherwise improve programs?



## ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

- 66 f. Performance goals and measures for responding to casework requests (see  
67 Paragraphs 10–12); and  
68 g. The kinds of assistance or relief that the agency can and cannot provide in  
69 response to a casework request.
- 70 2. Agencies should make their SOPs publicly available on their websites as a single,  
71 consolidated document and also should produce simplified, plain language summaries or  
72 flowcharts that succinctly summarize them.
- 73 3. When agencies adopt or substantially modify SOPs, they should solicit input and user  
74 experience-related feedback from congressional caseworkers.
- 75 4. Agencies should provide regular, internal trainings for both new and experienced staff  
76 involved in the management and resolution of congressional casework requests to ensure  
77 their familiarity and compliance with agency SOPs.

### Managing Casework Requests

- 78 5. Agencies should not automatically close out incoming casework requests that do not  
79 include required information or documentation. Instead, they should notify congressional  
80 caseworkers that their submissions are incomplete and work with them to remedy the  
81 deficiency.
- 82 6. When agencies take final action in response to a casework request, they should provide a  
83 written notice to the caseworker or office that clearly states that the agency has completed  
84 processing the request and explains the agency's final action.

### Using Technology to Streamline Request Management and Resolution

- 85 7. Consistent with their resources, agencies that receive a large volume of congressional  
86 casework requests should adopt electronic case management systems or web-based  
87 portals to improve the accuracy, efficiency, and timeliness of their management and  
88 resolution of requests. Such systems or portals should allow agency personnel to manage  
89 cases consistent with established SOPs and allow managers to monitor the status of  
90 requests and evaluate key performance goals and measures.

**Commented [CD2]:** For Committee Discussion: Should the recommendation (or preamble) specifically address the kinds of assistance or relief that the agency can and cannot provide?

**Commented [CD3]:** For Committee Discussion: Should there be any connection between case management systems used for congressional casework and case management systems used to manage other workloads (e.g., adjudication)?



## ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

- 91 8. In developing and modifying electronic case management systems and web-based  
92 portals, agencies should solicit feedback and suggestions for improvement from agency  
93 managers and staff and, as appropriate, congressional caseworkers.
- 94 9. When considering adoption or development of an electronic case management system or  
95 web-based portal, agencies should also consult with similarly situated agencies that may  
96 be able to share the code underlying comparable systems that are already in use and any  
97 lessons learned during their development or deployment.

Commented [CD4]: For Committee Discussion: Should the recommendation encourage any entity (e.g., GSA) to coordinate information sharing?

### Measuring Agency Performance

- 98 10. Agencies should collect structured data that allows managers to track and evaluate, as  
99 applicable:
- 100 a. Processing times for casework requests;
- 101 b. The nature, timing, and substance of communications between agency  
102 personnel and members of Congress and their staffs regarding specific  
103 casework requests;
- 104 c. Agency actions taken in response to casework requests;
- 105 d. The frequency with which members of Congress and their staffs resubmit  
106 casework requests;
- 107 e. Trainings and other assistance that agency personnel provide to members of  
108 Congress and their staffs regarding casework generally;
- 109 f. The congressional offices or caseworkers from which requests originate;
- 110 g. The identities and roles of agency personnel that work on requests; and
- 111 h. Any other data agencies determine to be helpful in assessing the performance  
112 of their casework management processes.
- 113 11. Agencies should adopt performance goals and, for each goal, objective measures that  
114 leverage data collected consistent with Recommendation 10 to evaluate whether  
115 congressional casework requests have been successfully managed and resolved. Agencies  
116 periodically should reassess performance goals, measures, and associated data collection  
117 practices to ensure they continue to reflect operational realities, programmatic



## ADMINISTRATIVE CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

118 developments, and the expectations of agency leaders and members of Congress and their  
119 staffs.

120 12. Agencies should evaluate on an ongoing basis whether they are meeting performance  
121 goals and, as appropriate, identify internal or external factors affecting their performance,  
122 identify opportunities for improvement, and predict future resource needs.

### Communicating Effectively with Congress

123 13. Agencies should foster strong working relationships with congressional caseworkers and  
124 maintain open lines of communication to provide information to and receive input from  
125 caseworkers on agency procedures and facilitate efficient resolution of constituent  
126 requests. Options for fostering such relationships include:

- 127 a. Providing a point of contact to whom caseworkers can direct questions about  
128 individual casework requests or casework generally;
- 129 b. Maintaining a webpage on the agency's website where caseworkers can access  
130 SOPs; any simplified, plain language summaries or flowcharts that summarize  
131 their SOPs; and any releases, waivers, or other documentation that caseworkers  
132 must submit with requests;
- 133 c. Organizing trainings or events—held virtually or in person in Washington, D.C.,  
134 and regionally—at which caseworkers can interact with agency personnel, learn  
135 about agency procedures for managing casework requests, learn to use and  
136 provide user experience feedback on any web-based portal the agency maintains  
137 for submitting and managing requests, and receive information about the kinds of  
138 assistance the agency can and cannot provide in response to requests;
- 139 d. Participating in trainings or other casework-focused events organized by other  
140 agencies, the House's Office of the Chief Administrative Officer, the Senate's  
141 Office of Education and Training, or other appropriate congressional entities; and

142 14. Organizing periodic, informal meetings with congressional offices and caseworkers  
143 with whom the agency regularly interacts to answer questions and solicit feedback.

**Commented [CD5]:** For Committee Discussion: Should this section include language that recommends agencies periodically consider whether congressional constituent inquiries are indicators of a broader issue that the agency should resolve at a higher policy level?