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Office of the Clerk
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-6601

July 15, 2021

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
Chairperson
Committee on House Administration
1309 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rodney Davis
Ranking Member
Committee on House Administration
1216 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairperson Lofgren and Ranking Member Davis,

As required by Section 502 of House Resolution 756 from the 116th Congress, agreed to by the House on March 10, 2020, I am attaching this quarterly report about the comparative print project.

If you or others on the Committee have questions about this report, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Clerk of the House

Enclosure

Comparative Print Project

As required by Section 502 of House Resolution 756 from the 116th Congress, the Clerk of the House submits this quarterly report about the comparative print project.

The House continues to build a suite of software programs that will allow House staff and others to create on-demand, point-in-time comparative prints for three distinct types of comparisons.¹ These comparative prints illustrate changes between

- two versions of a bill, resolution, or amendment (document to document comparisons)
- current law and current law as proposed to be changed by amendments contained in a bill, resolution, or amendment to current law (codified and non-codified law)
- a bill or resolution and the bill or resolution as proposed to be modified by amendments (amendment impact).

Project Updates

Stakeholder Engagement and the Pilot Group

Since the last report, the Clerk and the Legislative Counsel (through the project team and individually) have ensured that stakeholders are engaged in this project through individual conversations and status meetings. The project team has continued to engage a pilot group of Committee staff who are actively using the alpha/beta system. Throughout the pilot group period, staff have given feedback about the usability, desirability, learnability, and accuracy of the system. The group's responses continue to be positive and helpful.

During this reporting period, we invited staff to the pilot group and held two meetings. Currently, more than 130 House staff from the following fifteen Committees have access to the software: Agriculture; Appropriations; Armed Services; Education and Labor; Foreign Affairs; House Administration; Judiciary; Natural Resources; Oversight and Reform; Rules; Science, Space, and Technology; Small Business; Transportation and Infrastructure; Veterans' Affairs; and the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress. We also onboarded a small group from the Congressional Research Service and Congressional Budget Office. We will continue inviting committee staff, including those serving Committees that have yet to participate, to join the pilot group. We will schedule new participant onboarding and group-wide meetings during this quarter.

Suite of Software Programs

The Comparative Print System displays legislative changes in context: how a bill might change current law; how two versions of a legislative proposal differ; and how an amendment proposes to change a bill. Understanding these changes is critical to making decisions on pending legislation. We continue to improve these tools, including the Bill Viewer feature.

¹ <https://cha.house.gov/sites/democrats.cha.house.gov/files/documents/Clerk%20Comparative%20Print%20Report.pdf>;
<https://cha.house.gov/sites/democrats.cha.house.gov/files/Clerk-QR1-StandardizedFormat.pdf>.

In our system, comparative print results are shown in two ways: an online, dynamic, interactive report and a PDF that can be printed or downloaded. Users access these results through a key feature, the Toolbox View. Previous reports describe this feature in more detail. For this report, we will focus on a new feature we are adding to the How a Bill Changes Current Law program: the ability to request the report be run against different versions of the current law.

Current Law Versions

The Comparative Print System includes a database of federal law, specifically the positive law titles of the U.S. Code and a corpus of the Statute Compilations of public laws that do not appear in the U.S. Code or have not been classified to a title of the U.S. Code that has been enacted into positive law. The project team is building back-end components to track different versions of the law in this database.² This will enable us to create front-end components that provide the user the choice of running a comparative print based on current law as it is today or the law as of a date related to the bill's status or version (i.e., date of introduction, date passed the House or Senate).

For illustration, we can look at Public Law 117-17, which designates the Juneteenth holiday. This bill, S. 475, was enacted into law on June 17, 2021, and amends a positive law title of the U.S. Code. The U.S. Code has already been updated to reflect this federal law.

If the comparison to current law was requested on June 15, 2021, the day before the House passed the bill, the Comparative Print System would have accurately reflected the proposed changes to Section 6103(a) of title 5 of the U.S. Code.

§6103. Holidays

(a) The following are legal public holidays:

New Year's Day, January 1.
Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., the third Monday in January.
Washington's Birthday, the third Monday in February.
Memorial Day, the last Monday in May.
Juneteenth National Independence Day, June 19.
Independence Day, July 4.
Labor Day, the first Monday in September.
Columbus Day, the second Monday in October.
Veterans Day, November 11.
Thanksgiving Day, the fourth Thursday in November.
Christmas Day, December 25.

This illustration shows Section 6103(a) of title 5 of the U.S. Code as it is proposed to be changed by S. 475 (ES).

If a comparison were run a day after the U.S. Code had been updated, the Comparative Print System would display a user notification that the amendment could not be executed properly. The project team is refining this feature to return a user notification reporting the date the law

² <https://uscode.house.gov/currency/currency.shtml>; <https://www.govinfo.gov/help/comps>.

was updated. This point-in-time feature will be useful in a number of situations, including the re-use of legislative text drafted in a previous Congress and being reviewed for possible introduction or re-use in a new Congress. As we refine this feature, we will continue to update the Committee on our progress and other items the project team is working on related to the temporal nature of law. Related work will include properly displaying provisions of the law that have been enacted but may not be in effect yet.

Project Management

To complete this work, the project team uses agile methodologies, which allow for the continued refinement of the requirements and help ensure that the House obtains a product that meets its needs.

Roles and Responsibilities

Defining the roles and responsibilities needed to support this application is key. The Clerk’s Legislative Computer Systems division and the Office of the Legislative Counsel (HOLC) are identifying staff who can serve as Tier 1 and Tier 2 help desk support.

As mentioned in previous reports, system features, such as Changes to Existing Law and the Inbox, will be made available to users only after they receive required training. Other features, such as Bill Viewer and Bill-to-Bill Differences, will be made available to all House staff without training. The project team has been working with the Chief Administrative Officer’s Congressional Staff Academy to develop on-demand and instructor-led courses. Since the last report, we have completed development of an on-demand course that will be made available when the application is deployed House-wide. This on-demand course provides instructions on the use of the Bill Viewer and Bill-to-Bill Differences.

Roles and Responsibilities	CLERK	HOLC	CAO
Maintain the compare.house.gov system (software, hardware, related components)	X		
Maintain the files/content of the Statute Compilations component current law dataset		X	
Maintain data exchange components	X	X	
Maintain XML schemas (maintained by the Legislative Branch XML Working Group, which is co-chaired by Clerk staff)	X	X	
Receive and route user calls to the appropriate staff	X	X	X
Answer technical helpdesk calls (e.g., access, log-in)	X		TBD
Answer content-related calls (e.g., What is this comparison showing me? What is the current law?)		TBD	TBD
Provide access to the application to users	X	TBD	TBD
Training (on-demand webinars and instructor-led courses)	X	X	X

Project Funding

Currently, the project is closing out fiscal year 2020 funds from both the Office of the Clerk and HOLC. We have completed procurement activities to obligate fiscal year 21 funds.

Next Steps

The project team will continue working on tasks mentioned here as well as those in previous reports. Additionally, we plan to complete several back-end tasks related to House-wide deployment during this quarter.

We are excited about this project and the solution we are building. We see its potential impact on how staff complete their work and understand current law and legislative proposals. We will continue to update the Committee and stakeholders about the project's progress. We are using a phased-in approach to deployment, and we plan to release a beta version of the Comparative Print System House-wide at the end of 2021.