

Comment from Senior Fellow Jack Beermann on *Congressional Constituent Service Inquiries*
April 25, 2024

Here are a few comments:

Line 4. The preceding sentence refers to constituents contacting elected representatives and then the sentence starting on line 4 jumps to casework requests from congressional staff without saying that the constituent contact provokes that. There's a sentence missing.

Line 7, you have the "also" without the main event that casework results in assistance being provided. You need to have the first thing before the "also".

I agree with Bernard Bell's sentence, but maybe it should go first: "Ideally, individuals should not have to seek assistance from their elected representatives when interacting with federal agencies." Or something like that. Then hit what really happens.

Here's a proposed re-write of the first paragraph. I don't think it changes anything of substance, but it better expresses the idea behind the recommendation:

Since the country's earliest years, constituent services have been a cornerstone of the representational activities of members of Congress. Thousands of people each year contact their elected representatives for help while interacting with federal agencies and the programs they administer. in accessing federal programs and navigating administrative processes. Elected representatives often respond to requests from their constituents by contacting agencies on their behalf. Ideally the resolution of an individual's request for agency action and the explanation provided for failure to grant the request in whole or in part should be roughly equivalent whether that individual seeks assistance from an elected representative or instead seeks assistance from agency personnel, an agency ombud or a knowledgeable private representative or seeks no assistance at all. However, these constituent services, or "casework," requests—that is, requests submitted to an agency by congressional staff on behalf of constituents seeking assistance with accessing federal programs or navigating adjudicative and other similar administrative processes often appear to be helpful in ensuring appropriate and transparent agency action. Casework also plays an important role in congressional oversight of executive-branch agencies, allowing elected representatives to gain greater awareness of the operation and performance of federal the programs they authorize and fund.

Line 28, I would insert "such" before "as"

Line 31, I would change "are adopting" to either "have adopted" or "are employing"

In the list of things to address, should there be a suggestion of assigning a "ticket number" or something like that to help keep track of these requests?

Starting on line 144, although I agree with the spirit of Bernard Bell's suggested language, I do not think it belongs in a recommendation except for one sentence with some modifications:
Agencies should regularly consider whether congressional constituent inquiries are indicators of broader policy issues or procedural hurdles that the agency should address.

Jack