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Violence Against Members of Congress, Their Families, and Staff: Policy Responses

The personal security and safety of Members of Congress, their families, and their staffs are of enduring concern for the House, the Senate, and the United States Capitol Police (USCP). In the aftermath of some violent incidents against Members and staff, policy proposals and legislation have been considered. On a number of occasions, incidents of violence, or increased threats involving Members of Congress or congressional staff, have led to legislative or administrative responses changing policy and practice. These include the following:

- On November 24, 2025, the House Sergeant at Arms (HSAA) announced a series of initiatives to enhance Member security. This included establishment of a Member personal security program to use appropriated funds to pay for security services in a Member's district, during Member travel, and in Washington, DC, with some limitations; expansion of a residential security program that could pay for essential security improvements in a Member's home and for security monitoring and maintenance; and launch of an app to allow Members to signal duress.
- On September 18, 2025, the Senate adopted S.Res. 413 authorizing the use of funds from the Senators' Official Personnel and Office Expense Account (SOPOEA) for security enhancements and services provided to Senators. Security enhancements and services were not specified, but the resolution authorized the Committee on Rules and Administration to promulgate implementing regulations. For discussion of SOPOEA, see CRS Report R44399, *Senators' Official Personnel and Office Expense Account (SOPOEA): History and Usage*.
- Citing concerns about Member security in the House and in district offices, the House adopted H.Res. 411 in the 115th Congress (2017-2018) to increase the 2017 Members' Representative Allowance (MRA) for each House Member office by \$25,000. For discussion of the MRA, see CRS Report R40962, *Members' Representative Allowance: History and Usage*.
- The Committee on House Administration in 2017 approved an update to the *Members' Congressional Handbook* to provide additional guidance for updating security equipment and measures.
- Congress passed P.L. 115-45, the Wounded Officers Recovery Act of 2017. The measure authorizes the USCP Board to make payments from the U.S. Capitol Police Memorial Fund to USCP employees who sustain serious injuries in the line of duty.
- At the request of HSAA in 2017, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) issued an advisory opinion regarding the use of campaign funds by Members of the House for residential security systems. The FEC adopted rules in 2024 permitting use of campaign funds for certain security expenses.
- In fall 2001, congressional mail screening was initiated following the delivery of letters containing anthrax spores to the offices of Senators Patrick Leahy and Tom Daschle.
- The 91st Congress (1969-1970) passed a law making it a federal offense to assassinate, kidnap, or assault a Member of Congress or Member-elect, or to endeavor or conspire to commit such offenses, following the assassination of Senator Robert Francis Kennedy on June 6, 1968.
- The giving or accepting of challenges to a duel within the District of Columbia was prohibited, following the death of Representative Jonathan Cilley. Representative Cilley was killed in a duel with Representative William J. Graves on February 24, 1838, in Prince George's County, Maryland.

Some violent incidents in which Members may not have been the direct target have also led in part to congressional action. The attacks of September 11, 2001, were a contributing factor in increases to the number of USCP officers and staff, expedited deployment of a security perimeter planned prior to the attacks, and appropriations funding construction of the Capitol Visitor Center. Capitol bombings in 1971 and 1983 were reportedly some of the reasons for the introduction of visitor screening around the chamber galleries and Capitol entrances, respectively.

Legislation, 119th Congress

Following the murder of a Minnesota state legislator and her husband, and the shooting and wounding of another and his spouse at their homes, on June 23, 2025, Senator Amy Klobuchar introduced S. 2144, to improve the safety and security of Members of Congress, immediate family members of Members of Congress, and congressional staff. The bill would require government agencies not to publish, commercial data brokers not to sell, and other businesses not to post or publicly display the covered information of "at risk" individuals, including Members of Congress; their spouses, children, parents, or siblings; and congressional staff. Covered information includes the following: home addresses; personal telephone numbers or email addresses; Social Security or driver's license numbers; banking information; license plate numbers; the identification of a

child under 18 of an at risk individual; information regarding school or day care attendance, including schedules, school names, locations, or routes of travel; information regarding routes taken to or from an employment location; or precise geolocation data that can identify the location of a device of an at-risk individual.

S. 2144 was passed by the Senate with an amendment by unanimous consent on September 29, 2025. The bill was received in the House, where it was held at the desk, on October 10, 2025. No further action has been taken at the time of this writing.

Initiatives Considered Following Other Violent Incidents

Other instances of violence against Members and staff have resulted in discussions of various policy proposals. The focus of the proposals has varied, but includes attempts to enhance security in the House chamber, expand the criminal penalties for committing violence against Members and staff, restrict the number of firearms in proximity to Members as they conduct their official and electoral activities, and make provisions for Members to enhance their self-protection.

Chamber Security

In response to House gallery disturbances, in the 108th (2003-2004), 110th (2007-2008), and 112th (2011-2012) Congresses, Representative Dan Burton introduced various measures to enclose the visitors' galleries of the House of Representatives. H.Res. 665 of the 108th Congress and H.Res. 432 of the 110th Congress would have provided for enclosing the visitors' galleries with a transparent and substantial material. H.Res. 50 of the 112th Congress would have provided for enclosing the visitors' galleries of the House with a clear and bomb-proof material, and the installation of equipment to allow floor proceedings to be audible in the galleries. The measures were referred to various committees and subcommittees for consideration; no further action was taken.

In the aftermath of shootings in the House in 1954, in which gunmen fired from the galleries into the floor, wounding five Members and two staff, proposals to install transparent shields between visitors' galleries and the House floor were discussed, but no legislative action was taken.

Following a 1932 incident in which a gunman in the House gallery demanded the opportunity to address the House before surrendering his weapon, Representative Thomas Lindsay Blanton argued for limiting access to House galleries to those who have a proper purpose to be there. No change to rules governing access to House galleries was identified.

Member Security and Protection

Following a 2011 shooting in Tucson in which a congressional staff member and members of the public were killed, and a Representative, other congressional staff, and members of the public were wounded, a number of legislative proposals were introduced in the 112th Congress

(2011-2012). Representative Robert A. Brady introduced H.R. 318 to amend Title 18 of the *U.S. Code* to punish threats to commit violent crimes against Members of Congress. Representative Laura Richardson introduced H.R. 367, the Freedom to Serve Without Fear Act of 2011. The measure would have prohibited the knowing possession of a firearm near a venue at which a Member of Congress was performing an official, representational duty, or campaigning for public office. Representative Jim Gerlach introduced H.R. 815, the Justice for Public Servants Act of 2011. The measure would have amended the federal criminal code to make the killing of a Member of Congress or congressional employee, or the killing or attempted killing of a law enforcement officer or other first responder, an aggravating factor in death penalty determinations. The measures were referred to various committees and subcommittees for consideration; no further action was taken.

Member Personal Protection

A 2017 mass shooting in Alexandria, VA, involved at least 17 Members of Congress who had gathered to practice for an annual baseball game, along with some of their family members, staff, USCP protective officers, and the public. A Member and bystander were gravely wounded. Other Members, staff, and USCP officers suffered minor wounds. Following the incident, in addition to a number of security initiatives adopted by the House, several proposals were introduced during the 115th Congress (2017-2018).

Representative Mo Brooks introduced H.R. 2940, the Congressional Self-Defense Act. The measure would have authorized a Member of Congress to carry a concealed firearm in the U.S. Capitol subject to the regulations of the USCP Board, and carry anywhere else in the United States, with some exceptions. Representative Jody Hice introduced H.R. 2945, the Congressional Personal Safety Act. The measure would have authorized a Member of Congress to carry a firearm for any lawful purpose in any state, or in the congressional buildings other than the U.S. Capitol. Representative Brian Babin introduced H.R. 2951, which would have allowed Members of Congress to carry a concealed handgun anywhere in the United States, with exceptions. The measure would have authorized the USCP chief to issue a license or permit to carry a concealed handgun to a Member of Congress. H.R. 2951 would also have authorized Members of House to use official funds from their MRA, and Senators to use official funds from the Senators' Official Personnel and Office Expense Account, to pay for firearms training programs. The measures were referred to various committees and subcommittees for consideration; no further action was taken.

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