

The Honorable Darrell Issa
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mark Warner
459A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

June 21, 2011

Dear Chairman Issa and Senator Warner:

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to express our support for efforts to improve federal financial transparency. Chairman Issa, Senator Warner, and President Obama deserve praise for their leadership in building upon the successes of USASpending.gov and the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board as part of an effort to account for every penny of federal spending.

Representative Issa's efforts in the House and Senator Warner's efforts in the Senate, as embodied in the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act of 2011, would have the most transformative effect, as the legislation would establish a federal transparency board with the dual missions of expanding spending transparency to the entire government and identifying government-wide financial data standards. The RATB has demonstrated the importance of the former, especially when it comes to preventing waste, fraud, and abuse. Our own experience with incomplete, incompatible, and incomprehensible government datasets underscores the importance of the government-wide standards.

President Obama's June 13, 2011, Executive Order has the immediate effect of creating a Government Accountability and Transparency Board with the mission applying the lessons of the RATB to the entire federal government. Within 6 months, the Board must present a plan to integrate government spending data. It is long past time to move forward on federal spending transparency.

These are complementary efforts. The Federal Accountability and Spending Transparency Board, as envisioned by Chairman Issa and Senator Warner, will have the opportunity to learn from the report to be issued by President Obama's Government Accountability and Transparency Board. Similarly, if enacted, the DATA Act will revolutionize federal spending transparency by impelling agency compliance and addressing the thorny but crucial questions of data standardization.

There are improvements to both efforts that our organizations are seeking, although our biggest concern is that the plans have a limited duration. President Obama's Executive Order has a lifespan of his administration's willingness to pursue these transparency objectives. Similarly, Chairman Issa and Senator Warner's legislation would sunset after 7 years, ending both this new effort and pre-existing transparency laws. So long as we have government, we must have transparency. We cannot let the sun set on government openness and accountability. President Obama, Chairman Issa, and Senator Warner should work to extend these transparency programs indefinitely.

We look forward to the mark-up of the DATA Act and the implementation of the Executive Order, and encourage Chairman Issa, Senator Warner, and the President to continue to work with one another, members of the transparency community, and the American people.

If you have any questions, please contact Daniel Schuman of the Sunlight Foundation at 202-742-1520 x 273 or dschuman@sunlightfoundation.com.

Sincerely yours,

American Library Association
Center for Fiscal Accountability
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington
FreeGovInfo
Government Accountability Project
iSolon.org
The Participatory Politics Foundation
Project on Government Oversight
Publish What You Fund
The Sunlight Foundation

cc:

The Honorable Elijah Cummings
The Honorable Joseph Lieberman
The Honorable Susan Collins
The Honorable Barack Obama