The Honorable Tom Carper  
Chairman, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee  
513 Hart Senate Office Building

The Honorable Dr. Tom Coburn  
Ranking Member, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee  
172 Russell Senate Office Building

February 11, 2014

Dear Senators Carper and Coburn:

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing in support of the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (DATA Act), S. 994 and H.R. 2061. The DATA Act is an important bipartisan bill that would help usher in true spending transparency. Recently, Federal News Radio published a leaked document containing draft OMB recommendations to amend the legislation in a way that would severely weaken it. OMB has not yet taken an official position on the DATA Act and we hope it ultimately will support the provisions you have outlined.

The draft OMB language would hollow out the DATA Act’s central purpose: to transform federal spending from disconnected documents into open data -- standardized, structured, and available to citizens and policy makers. The revisions would also strip the DATA Act of its funding mechanism and supplant OMB in the Treasury Department’s role.

The DATA Act directs the Treasury Department to establish data standards for spending, guide agencies toward implementing the standards, and publish the whole corpus of federal spending on USASpending.gov. Treasury is eager to take on these challenges. Fiscal service commissioner David Lebryk embraced the transformation of federal spending information in an address last year and Treasury has designated an executive director for data transparency, Christina Ho, who has promised to pursue standardization and publication.

The draft proposal replaces the DATA Act's explicit mandates for the Treasury Department to establish government-wide data standards in spending with vague directives for OMB to "review and if necessary revise standards to ensure accuracy and consistency." This, and other language in the proposal, removes any real meaning from the legislation.

We were happy to see Senator Warner’s recent comments rejecting the draft proposal. We look forward to working with you and the House and Senate cosponsors to quickly pass a strong DATA Act that incorporates the best of the House and Senate versions of the legislation.

As you made clear in your recent testimony before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, the final bill must retain strong mandates for data standardization and publication. It should also house responsibility for implementation in an agency that has shown
real commitment to these values. We thank you for your strong support of these critical reforms and join you in rejecting the draft proposal.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further. Please contact Daniel Schuman of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington at 202-408-5565 and dschuman@citizensforethics.org or Matt Rumsey of the Sunlight Foundation at mrumsey@sunlightfoundation.com.

Sincerely,

American Library Association
Center for Responsive Politics
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Council for Citizens Against Government Waste
The Data Transparency Coalition
Enterprise Data Management Council
Global Integrity
Government Accountability Project
Gun Owners of America
iSolon.org
Liberty Coalition
National Priorities Project
Object Management Group
The Project On Government Oversight
R Street Institute
Sunlight Foundation
The Open Knowledge Foundation
Transparency International - USA

cc:
The Honorable Mark Warner
475 Russell Senate Office Building

The Honorable Rob Portman
448 Russell Senate Office Building