President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500  

February 11, 2014  

Dear President Obama:  

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to urge you to support an ongoing bipartisan effort in Congress to improve the state of federal spending information by publicly backing a strong mandate for data standardization and publication and then signing the bill when it reaches your desk.  

Many of our organizations cheered the Open Data Policy and the Obama Administration's first and second Open Government National Action Plans. These actions suggest that the Obama Administration favors data standardization and publication.  

The Open Data Policy sets forth seven characteristics of government "open data," requiring both consistent standardization and consolidated publication. It commits the White House to implement those characteristics across federal data, explicitly emphasizing procurement and assistance data.  

The Administration's second Open Government National Action Plan declares to other members of the global Open Government Partnership that our government will "open up federal spending data," in part by following the recommendations of President Obama's Government Accountability and Transparency Board. The GAT Board's first set of recommendations, which it released in December 2011, called on the government to establish a common data standard for federal grant and contract identification.  

In recent days, Federal News Radio published a leaked draft of the Office of Management and Budget's proposed revisions to the Senate version of the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act. We understand that the draft is not necessarily the official position of the administration and hope to have the opportunity to consult with OMB prior to its issuing any final recommendations. While some of our groups have had preliminary meetings with OMB and the White House on this issue, we were surprised by OMB's draft proposal.  

First, the draft proposal removes the DATA Act's explicit mandates for the Treasury Department to establish government-wide data standards in spending and for the agencies to apply them. In their place was substituted a vague directive to "review and if necessary revise standards to ensure accuracy and consistency" and to "prescribe open data structures." OMB already has the power to accomplish the directives it proposes in the draft, and the point of the DATA Act is to go further and to mandate action. In addition, under the draft proposal agencies are not required to take any action at all.
Second, the draft proposal splits the publication mandate amongst multiple websites, ensuring that the chief benefit of spending data transparency for citizens--all federal spending information published, integrated, and searchable together--will not be realized.

We are urging Congress to pass the DATA Act with the strongest reforms from the House and Senate versions. We hope that you share Congress’ vision for the DATA Act, which itself builds upon legislation you authored when in the Senate. When a strong mandate for spending data standardization and publication reaches your desk we urge you to sign it.

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