

February 20, 2019

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
House Majority Leader
1705 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Elijah Cummings
Chairman
House Committee on Oversight and Reform
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jim Jordan
Ranking Member
House Committee on Oversight and Reform
2105 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
Chairperson
Committee on House Administration
1316 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rodney Davis
Ranking Member
Committee on House Administration
1309 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Hoyer, Chairman Cummings, Ranking Member Jordan, Chairperson Lofgren, and Ranking Member Davis:

We are writing to express our gratitude for the creation of the House Office of the Whistleblower Ombudsman in the House Rules package for the 116th Congress. It is heartening to see the House leadership's renewed acknowledgement of the intrinsic value that whistleblowers bring to Congress, as well as your dedication to ensuring that offices are fluent in best practices when working with whistleblowers. For this office to fulfill its important mandate, it must be led by an independent, tireless champion for whistleblowers, one who knows from experience what the relationship between whistleblowers and Congress can and should be.

Our organizations sit on the steering committee of the Make It Safe Coalition, an independent collaboration of trans-ideological advocates who work to advance whistleblower policies and best practices. Our full coalition includes labor unions, whistleblower law firms, civil society organizations from across the political spectrum, and whistleblowers themselves. Together, we thank you for taking this first step in ensuring that whistleblowers and offices in the House can work together in a mutually beneficial and productive way.

Given our collective experience, we know how impactful a single office or committee can be in turning the tide in making sure a whistleblower's disclosure is taken seriously, and in an individual whistleblower's pursuit of relief after they've been retaliated against. Even before the creation of this office, Members of Congress have provided lifelines to whistleblowers who would otherwise have lost their careers and their livelihoods. At the same time, we understand how whistleblower contact with a Congressional office can have a negative impact. Even the most well-intentioned Congressional Member or staffer can make catastrophic mistakes that damage a whistleblower's efforts if they don't fully understand the intricacies of protecting the whistleblower's identity, taking their disclosures seriously, and respecting their priorities.

That is why we are thrilled that the Office of the Whistleblower Ombudsman is charged with making sure that Hill offices have the resources and training they need to receive whistleblower disclosures. We believe this training will have an immediate practical benefit, while also helping Members and staffers better understand the reality of blowing the whistle and the terrible impact it can have on the whistleblower's life. The potential for real change through this office is monumental.

To succeed in fulfilling its mandate, the office will need a strong, independent leader who understands the ins and outs of Congressional-whistleblower relationships and who is free of any partisan or ulterior motives. We strongly encourage you to consider suggestions from outside individuals and organizations that submit names of leaders who might be well-suited to fill the Ombudsman position. Moreover, it is crucial that you hire the Ombudsman directly, rather than appointing a contract employee to lead the office.

We would also appreciate any information about the resources you plan to make available for the office as it strives to fulfill its important mandate.

Thank you again for your commitment to improving and preserving healthy and productive communications between the House of Representatives and whistleblowers. We're excited to see what this office achieves in the 116th Congress and beyond.

If you have any questions or wish to follow up on this letter, please reach out to Rebecca Jones at the Project On Government Oversight at rjones@pogo.org or 202-347-1122.

Sincerely,

Louis Clark, Executive Director/CEO
Government Accountability Project

Michael Ostrolenk, Co-Founder/National Director
Liberty Coalition

Pete Sepp, President
National Taxpayers Union

Danielle Brian, Executive Director
Project On Government Oversight

Lisa Gilbert, Vice President of Legislative Affairs
Public Citizen

David Williams, President
Taxpayers Protection Alliance