

October 5, 2021

The Honorable Gary Peters
Chairman
Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
724 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rob Portman
Ranking Member
Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
448 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Peters and Ranking Member Portman:

As the committee meets tomorrow to consider legislation to strengthen the federal inspectors general system, we the undersigned organizations urge you to support the strongest possible reforms to this critical anti-corruption framework. Improving the inspectors general system is a historically bipartisan issue with far-reaching national benefits. As a coalition of organizations representing a diverse range of ideological viewpoints, we strongly encourage the committee to expeditiously advance legislation that ensures inspectors general are afforded the independence and authority necessary to do their jobs effectively and with the highest ethical standards.

Inspectors general are expected to identify waste, fraud, and abuse in federal programs and recommend solutions to achieve a more effective and accountable government. For over four decades, they have done so with remarkable success. In fiscal year 2020 alone, inspectors general across the federal government identified potential savings of approximately \$53 billion, representing a \$17 return on every \$1 of taxpayer money that Congress invested in those offices.¹ But these watchdogs have alerted Congress to consequential weaknesses in the laws that undermine their ability to do this important work to the standard the American public deserves.²

We support reforms that ensure adequate and effective congressional oversight over the president's decision to remove any federal inspector general. Too often administrations — from both political parties

¹ Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, *Fiscal Year 2020 Annual Report to the President and Congress*, (2021). https://www.ignet.gov/sites/default/files/417329-FY20_Annual_Report-President%26Congress-WEB.pdf.

² Letter from Chair of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's Legislation Committee Kathy Buller to the Office of Management and Budget's Acting Executive Chairperson for the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency Lesley Field outlining the committee's legislative priorities for the 117th Congress, January 28, 2021, 3. https://www.ignet.gov/sites/default/files/untracked/CIGIE_Legislative_Priorities_117th_Congress.pdf; Letter from nine former inspectors general to Congress about the urgent need to reform the inspectors general system, May 5, 2020. <https://www.pogo.org/letter/2020/05/former-inspectors-general-call-on-congress-to-pass-overdue-reforms-to-ig-system/>.

— have flouted the existing law requiring the president to explain any inspector general removal to Congress 30 days prior to the removal going into effect. This willingness on the part of the executive to circumvent congressional oversight not only challenges inspectors' general independence, leaving them vulnerable to political interference, but also destabilizes the inspector general community more broadly.

It is critical that Congress require the president to communicate a detailed and case-specific reason why they are removing an inspector general and provide lawmakers the opportunity to determine whether the removal is appropriate and warranted. The Securing Inspector General Independence Act, introduced by Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Chairman Peters (D-MI) with strong bipartisan support, would clarify that a president must provide Congress with a substantive rationale before firing an inspector general.³

We also support reforms that provide inspectors general with the tools they need to fully investigate wrongdoing or malfeasance in their affiliated federal agencies. Currently, government officials are able to evade an inspector general investigation by simply resigning their post. Congress must provide inspectors general with testimonial subpoena authority to close this accountability gap and to compel these individuals to provide testimony when they are in possession of information relevant to an investigation. Both the IG Testimonial Subpoena Authority Act,⁴ introduced by Senator Maggie Hassan (D-NH), and the IG Independence and Empowerment Act,⁵ introduced by Representative Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), would grant inspectors general this authority.

Finally, we support reforms that ensure inspectors general themselves are held accountable for wrongdoing. To this end, it is necessary to reform and strengthen the Integrity Committee within the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, the body responsible for overseeing the overseers. The IG Independence and Empowerment Act would require the Integrity Committee to submit more detailed information to Congress regarding their review process for allegations of misconduct against inspectors general.⁶

Reforming the inspectors general system is a critical step toward fighting corruption and increasing public trust in our government. We thank you for your consideration of these important proposals.

³ Securing Inspector General Independence Act, S. 587, 117th Cong., (2021). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/587>; Letter from Issue One to the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee supporting an enhanced notification requirement, August 10, 2021, <https://www.issueone.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/FINAL-IG-Markup-Letter.pdf>.

⁴ IG Testimonial Subpoena Authority Act, S. 1974, 117th Cong., (2021). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1794?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Inspector+General+Testimonial+Subpoena+Authority+Act%22%5D%7D&s=10&r=1>

⁵ IG Independence and Empowerment Act, H.R. 2662, 117th Cong., (2021). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/2662>

⁶ IG Independence and Empowerment Act, H.R. 2662, 117th Cong., (2021). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/2662>

Sincerely,

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Common Cause
Demand Progress
Empower Oversight Whistleblowers & Research
Government Accountability Project
Government Information Watch
Issue One
National Center for Health Research
National Security Counselors
National Taxpayers Union
Niskanen Center
Open The Government
Project On Government Oversight
Protect Democracy
Public Citizen
R Street Institute
Stand Up America
Taxpayers for Common Sense
Transparency International – U.S. Office
Union of Concerned Scientists
Whistleblowers of America

cc: Members of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs