



November 14, 2024

President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We at the Project On Government Oversight (POGO) are writing to again ask you to remove Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Inspector General Joseph V. Cuffari.¹ We also urge you to nominate permanent, qualified replacements for this critical watchdog, as well as the inspector general for the General Services Administration.

POGO is a nonpartisan, independent watchdog that investigates and exposes waste, corruption, abuse of power, and when the government fails to serve the public or silences those who report wrongdoing. We champion reforms to achieve a more effective, ethical, and accountable federal government that safeguards constitutional principles.

On October 2, 2024, the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's (CIGIE) Integrity Committee (IC) summarized its nearly 200-page report of a years-long investigation in a letter recommending that Cuffari be "referred for appropriate action, up to and including removal."² The letter and investigation, in addition to new information unearthed by POGO's investigators, make clear that you must take action to remove this ineffective inspector general before you leave office.

Integrity Committee Investigation and Letter

According to CIGIE, inspectors general are expected to adhere to the "highest ethical principles" as they work to detect and prevent fraud, waste, abuse, and misconduct

¹ Danielle Brian and Joanna Derman, "POGO Calls on Biden to Remove Inspectors General Cuffari, Ennis," Project On Government Oversight, March 8, 2023, <https://www.pogo.org/letter/2023/03/pogo-calls-on-biden-to-remove-inspectors-general-cuffari-ennis>; Danielle Brian and Joanna Derman, "POGO Calls on President Biden to Remove DHS IG Cuffari," Project On Government Oversight, April 8, 2022, <https://www.pogo.org/letter/2022/04/pogo-calls-on-president-biden-to-remove-dhs-ig-joseph-cuffari>; Danielle Brian, "President Biden: Remove Inspectors General Cuffari and Ennis Immediately," Project On Government Oversight, September 21, 2023, <https://www.pogo.org/policy-letters/president-biden-remove-inspectors-general-cuffari-and-ennis-immediately>.

² Letter from the Integrity Committee to President Biden report of findings for Integrity Committee Case 20-059, October 2, 2024, 2, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/25183491-integrity-committee-letter-to-the-white-house-regarding-dhs-ig-cuffari-dated-october-2-2024#document/p22/a2592542>; Integrity Committee, *Redacted Report of Investigation on Cuffari, Costello, et al. dated September 6, 2024*, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/25183714-redacted-report-of-investigation-on-cuffari-costello-et-al-dated-september-6-2024#document/p87/a2592579>.

throughout the federal government.³ To hold them accountable, Congress designated the IC to handle allegations of misconduct by inspectors general and high-level office of inspectors general officials.⁴ The IC’s investigation of Cuffari, summarized in its letter to you, concluded that Cuffari had “engaged in conduct undermining the independence or integrity reasonably expected of his position,” and that “Cuffari abused his authority in the exercise of his official duties and engaged in substantial misconduct in the form of a gross waste of funds.”⁵

The committee starkly lays out the significance of the office Cuffari holds, writing that “[i]ndependent, objective, credible oversight of DHS is also critically important to help ensure our safety, and much of this responsibility falls to its Office of Inspector General.”⁶ The DHS Office of Inspector General is also the watchdog of the largest law enforcement agency in the country. As such, the leader of that office must demonstrate they’re worthy of the trust and power placed in them. This latest IC report is only the latest evidence that Cuffari is not.

Cuffari’s “War on Oversight”

A recent POGO investigation found that Cuffari “has waged a years-long campaign to derail and discredit investigations into allegations of his misconduct.”⁷ Cuffari and his close allies have filed two lawsuits (the first one was dismissed by a federal judge) that seek to undermine the very structure and work of the Integrity Committee. POGO’s investigation also found that Cuffari and his allies have erected roadblocks to the IC’s investigation, which may help explain why the probe has taken years to complete. Given that his primary role is to investigate and address wrongdoing, Cuffari’s war on oversight is particularly concerning.

Remove Cuffari

POGO called for Cuffari’s removal as early as 2022, citing his continued delay in publishing a report on sexual misconduct and harassment in DHS law enforcement agencies. Later, after our investigations revealed his months-long delay in informing Congress about the mass deletion of Secret Service text messages, including from January 6, 2021, and after Cuffari himself told Congress he regularly deleted text messages from his government phone in what may be a violation of federal records law, we again called for his removal.⁸

³ Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, “Quality Standards for Federal Offices of Inspector General,” 7, <https://www.ignet.gov/sites/default/files/files/Silver%20Book%20Revision%20-%208-20-12r.pdf>.

⁴ 5a U.S.C. compiled § 1211 (2019), Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, 5a U.S.C. §§ 1-13 (2024) <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/5a/compiledact-95-452>.

⁵ Letter from the Integrity Committee to President Biden, 2 [see note 2].

⁶ Letter from the Integrity Committee to President Biden, 1 [see note 2].

⁷ Nick Schwellenbach, “A Watchdog’s War on Oversight,” Project On Government Oversight, October 2, 2024, <https://www.pogo.org/investigations/a-watchdogs-war-on-oversight>.

⁸ Nick Schwellenbach and Adam Zagorin, “DHS Watchdog Nixed Alert to Congress About Purged January 6 Texts, New Docs Show,” Project On Government Oversight, August 11, 2022, <https://www.pogo.org/investigations/dhs-watchdog-nixed-alert-to-congress-about-purged-january-6-texts-new-docs-show>; Adam Zagorin and Nick

In its letter to you, the IC notes that it has taken this matter as far as it can, writing that “The IC has significant doubts about the cooperation it would receive going forward from key witnesses in light of the fact that both IG Cuffari and certain other subjects of IC investigations sued the IC in a case that was later dismissed.”⁹ The ball is squarely in your court.

The failures of this inspector general threaten not only the work of DHS, but the work of every IG across the government. POGO supports strengthening the independence and accountability of these critical watchdogs — and that includes calling for their removal when they are unable or unwilling to perform their duties. We implore you to act to remove this harmful IG before you leave office.

Nominate New Watchdogs

We urge you to nominate replacements for IG Cuffari and for the vacant inspector general position at the General Services Administration as soon as possible. DHS needs an effective and qualified permanent inspector general as we face an incoming administration that has promised mass deportations and detentions.¹⁰ The General Services Administration, which is in charge of overseeing the presidential transition, also needs a permanent watchdog. Both nominations need only pass out of one committee before a full floor vote could be scheduled, making it possible to fill these roles before you leave office.

Thank you for considering action on these critical issues.

Sincerely,



Danielle Brian
Executive Director

Schwellenbach, “Protecting the Predators at DHS,” Project On Government Oversight, April 7, 2022, <https://www.pogo.org/investigations/protecting-the-predators-at-dhs>; Nick Schwellenbach, “DHS Watchdog Regularly Purges Texts on Gov’t Phone Despite Ongoing Investigation,” Project On Government Oversight, June 6, 2023, <https://www.pogo.org/investigation/2023/06/dhs-watchdog-regularly-purges-texts-on-govt-phone-despite-ongoing-investigation>.

⁹ Letter from the Integrity Committee to President Biden, 21 [see note 2].

¹⁰ Rosa Flores, Julia Vargas Jones, Ashley Killough, Ed Lavandera, Mark Morales, Alicia Park, Polo Sandoval, Sara Weisfeldt, and Rachel Clarke, “Donald Trump has promised a closed border and mass deportations. Those affected are taking action now,” CNN, November 11, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/11/11/us/closed-border-trump-immigration-deportation/index.html>.