



**Testimony of Joanna Derman, Policy Analyst
Project On Government Oversight
for the House Committee on Appropriations
Financial Services and General Government Subcommittee
on “Listing Unpublished Inspector General Reports on Oversight.gov”
May 28, 2022**

Dear Chairman Quigley, Ranking Member Womack, and Members of the House Financial Services and General Government Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony with respect to listing unpublished Inspector General (IG) reports on Oversight.gov. My name is Joanna Derman, and I am a policy analyst at the Project On Government Oversight (POGO).

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.

As you know, Congress enacted the Inspector General Act of 1978 to establish a system of watchdogs who work within — but oversee — federal agencies by conducting audits, investigations, and inspections of agency programs and operations.¹ The offices of inspectors general are independent, objective entities that serve as a key part of an agency’s internal controls. They are charged with promoting economy, efficiency, and effectiveness, and with preventing and detecting fraud, waste, and abuse.

Year in and year out, the inspector general community has conducted meaningful and impactful oversight. In fiscal year 2021 alone, the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) found that the combined work of the IG community resulted in potential savings equal to approximately \$74.7 billion, broken down into \$62.7 billion in potential savings from audit recommendations and an additional \$12 billion from investigative receivables and recoveries. The IG community’s aggregate budget for fiscal year 2021 was approximately \$3.4 billion, which CIGIE calculated represents the potential savings of a remarkable \$22 return on every dollar invested in IG oversight efforts.²

¹ 5a U.S.C. § 1-13 (2022), <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/5a/compiledact-95-452>.

² Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, *Annual Report to the President and Congress for Fiscal Year 2021*, 1, <https://www.ignet.gov/sites/default/files/files/992-011CIGIEAnnualReport-Full508.pdf>.

In 2017, CIGIE launched Oversight.gov, a central repository for reports from all 74 statutory inspectors general.³ The website hosts a wide range of reports, including audits, investigations, inspections, and evaluations, which contain findings and recommendations intended to help agencies improve their programs and operations. Oversight.gov represents a major step forward in improved accessibility and accountability for the work products of federal inspectors general. It is critically important that Congress, government accountability organizations, and the public are able to search across multiple IG offices for reports and recommendations. Oversight.gov allows for such searches to be conducted in a much more efficient and expedited manner. Access to this kind of database allows the public to call out wasteful or illegal practices and to efficiently mobilize and coordinate oversight efforts.⁴ In this way, publication of IG reports through platforms like Oversight.gov can significantly increase the influence and impact of an IG's work.

POGO has consistently advocated for Oversight.gov funding.⁵ The site requires a steady funding stream to continue its operations, improve its functionality, and provide expanded services. Prior to the direct appropriation in fiscal year 2019, financial resources for CIGIE operations came through funds provided by its constituent inspector general offices and held in a revolving fund stipulated through the Inspector General Act of 1978. In fiscal year 2019, the Financial Services and General Government appropriations bill provided \$2,000,000 to the revolving fund of CIGIE, and in fiscal year 2020 the Financial Services and General Government Appropriations bill made \$1,000,000 available for expenses related to enhancements to Oversight.gov.⁶ In both fiscal year 2021 and fiscal year 2022, the Financial Services and General Government appropriations bills provided \$850,000 for enhancements to Oversight.gov.⁷ We applaud the funding of this important initiative, and we encourage Congress to continue supporting the necessary access provided by Oversight.gov — and allow for increased functionality on the site — by providing “robust funding” to CIGIE.

³ Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, *Annual Report*, [See note 2]; Kathryn A. Francis, Congressional Research Service, *Inspector General Community Launches Oversight.gov to Increase Accessibility to Reports* (August 15, 2017), https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20170815_IN10752_6e65768287537f5d032d7297888fb7c1a40014d7.pdf.

⁴ *Restoring Independence: Rebuilding the Federal Offices of Inspectors General: Hearing before the House Oversight and Reform Committee, Subcommittee on Government Operations*, 117th Cong. (April 20, 2021) (testimony of Liz Hempowicz, director of public policy at the Project On Government Oversight), <https://www.pogo.org/testimony/2021/04/strengthening-government-watchdogs>; Liz Hempowicz, Peter Tyler and Rebecca Jones, Project On Government Oversight, *The Watchdog After Forty Years: Recommendations for Our Nation's Federal IGs* (July 9, 2018), <https://www.pogo.org/report/2018/07/watchdogs-after-forty-years-recommendations-for-our-nations-federal-inspectors-general/>.

⁵ *Public Witness Day: Hearing before the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch*, 116th Cong. (April 2, 2019) (testimony of Rebecca Jones, policy counsel at the Project On Government Oversight), <https://www.pogo.org/testimony/2019/04/house-and-capitol-police-inspectors-general-should-make-their-reports-public/>.

⁶ S. Rep. No. 115-281, at 79 (2018), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRPT-115srpt281/pdf/CRPT-115srpt281.pdf#page=79>; S. Rep. No. 115-111, at 131 (2019), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRPT-116srpt111/pdf/CRPT-116srpt111.pdf#page=131>.

⁷ See Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, *Annual Report*, 12 [See note 2]; <https://docs.house.gov/billssthisweek/20201221/BILLS-116RCP68-JES-DIVISION-E.pdf#page=86>; H.R. Rep. No. 117-79, at 119 (2021), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRPT-117hrpt79/pdf/CRPT-117hrpt79.pdf#page=119>.

While critical, however, continued funding of Oversight.gov is not sufficient to ensure public access to all reports. Not all IG reports are listed on Oversight.gov. In fact, many IG reports are not listed on any public website. This is a problem because it makes it difficult for the public to track the findings and recommendations of inspectors general. The Inspector General Empowerment Act of 2016 requires the vast majority of IGs to publicly publish on their website any audit, inspection, or evaluation report they transmit to their affiliated federal agency, but not all IGs subject to these reporting requirements release all of their reports publicly.⁸ This is because the statute also states that IG reports should not be posted if their publication would contradict other statutes that prohibit disclosure due to concerns surrounding classification, national security, or privacy.

POGO recognizes that such concerns are deserving of careful consideration. However, a number of executive branch inspectors general — such as the GAO IG and the Department of Defense IG — have instituted measures to ensure the public is at least aware of the reports' existence. For example, the GAO IG provides basic information, such as the report title or report number when it is not possible to release the report's contents, which allow members of the public and transparency organizations to request access via FOIA. As a result, the sensitive contents of the IG reports remain protected, and the Congress as well as the public are able to track the IG's findings and recommendations for the purpose of exercising robust oversight. If the inspectors general at the GAO and the Department of Defense — which both produce a large number of classified and sensitive reports — can provide this level of transparency, any IG should be able to take proactive steps that ensure the public is not in the dark about these reports.

Therefore, in addition to providing funding for Oversight.gov, I also urge the Appropriations Committee to request that CIGIE publish to their website a public-facing list of non-public IG reports, broken out by each office of inspector general.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony.

⁸ The Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, requires all establishment and designated federal entity inspectors general to adhere with these public posting requirements. See 5 U.S.C. App. § 8M(b)(1)(A) (2022), <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title5a-node20-section8M&num=0&edition=prelim>.