

April 10, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leaders McCarthy, McConnell, and Schumer and Speaker Pelosi:

The undersigned organizations write to express our grave and urgent concern for the independence of federal inspectors general. We urge you to expeditiously pass for-cause removal protections for inspectors general. The work of watchdogs, by nature, attracts attention from those whose political interests may be impacted by aggressive oversight. And yet IGs lack independence on the most fundamental level: they do not have for-cause removal protections. To operate effectively, IGs need independence both from the agency they are overseeing, and from the president.

Considering the center-stage role that inspectors general will play in overseeing the relief funds pursuant to the CARES Act, this independence is crucial to ensure that IGs are empowered to conduct the most rigorous oversight possible over the distribution and use of funds appropriated to address the ongoing crisis.

The new Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC), which will oversee all federal funds allocated to provide pandemic relief, relies entirely on the integrity and independence of the IGs that compose it.¹ By abruptly firing the Intelligence Community Inspector General last week and replacing the Acting Inspector General that had been appointed to lead the PRAC, the President has shown just how little independence and insulation these watchdogs currently have.

Inspectors General were created in the wake of the Watergate scandal as a critical resource for Congress to oversee executive branch spending and programs. They free up massive amounts of wasted or misspent taxpayer dollars, and ensure that federal programs operate effectively, ethically, and in line with the Constitution.

For-cause removal protections are not novel. The inspector general for the U.S. Postal Service, for example, already benefits from a for-cause removal standard.² Nor is the importance of

¹ Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Pub. L. 116-136. § 15010(c)(2).
<https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/hr748/BILLS-116hr748enr.pdf>

² [39 U.S.C. Part 1 CH 2 § 202\(e\)\(3\)](#)

protecting IGs new to Congress. For example, the version of the 2008 IG Reform Act that passed the House with bipartisan support included for cause removal protections.³ These were stripped from the final bill prior to passage but nevertheless created a starting point that you can build on.

There's a reason why inspectors general have traditionally always had bipartisan support in Congress: their work is paramount to a functioning government that's built on checks and balances. We cannot afford to ask IGs to choose between performing their jobs with integrity or losing their careers, especially when performing their jobs with integrity will be critical to ensure that the emergency funding being approved by Congress will not be lost to waste or fraud.

Congress must act to protect IGs now.

Sincerely,

ACORN8

Action Group Network

Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)

Common Cause

Demand Progress

Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC)

Equal Justice Society

Government Accountability Project

Government Information Watch

National Center for Health Research

National Taxpayers Union

National Women's Health Network

Niskanen Center

Open The Government

Project On Government Oversight

Protect Democracy

Public Citizen

R Street Institute

Revolving Door Project

Senior Executives Association

Taxpayers Protection Alliance

Union of Concerned Scientists

Whistleblowers of America

Woodhull Freedom Foundation

³ Inspector General Reform Act of 2008, H.R. 928 §2(a)(1), 110th Congress. As passed by the House of Representatives. <https://www.congress.gov/110/bills/hr928/BILLS-110hr928eh.pdf>