

June 28, 2021

Dear Representative:

The undersigned organizations write to express our support for the IG Independence and Empowerment Act (H.R. 2662) and to urge you to vote for this critical legislation.

Our federal inspectors general (IGs) identify and investigate waste, fraud, and abuse within the executive branch. The importance of their work cannot be overstated. Executive branch officials and Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle rely on oversight conducted by inspectors general to inform their policy-making. These watchdogs continually return substantial savings for taxpayers. In fiscal year 2020 alone, inspectors general identified potential savings of approximately \$53 billion.¹ And perhaps most importantly, inspectors general investigate and expose abuses of power that may infringe on constitutional rights.²

If enacted, this legislation would address critical weaknesses in laws that have limited the effectiveness and threatened the independence of these watchdogs.

For example, most inspectors general lack the authority to compel former agency officials, subcontractors, or subgrantees to cooperate with IG investigations.³ This has limited the ability of our watchdogs to effectively review federal programs for waste and fraud and to investigate federal employees accused of misconduct.⁴ The IG Independence and Empowerment Act would address this by giving inspectors general the authority to compel testimony from former agency officials, subcontractors, or grantees where that testimony would be relevant to ongoing investigations.

Another weakness is that the president can fire these watchdogs and replace them with unqualified or conflicted individuals,⁵ exposing the work of these offices to unnecessary political interference. The public and Congress depend on inspectors general to ensure our federal agencies are functioning effectively, but these watchdogs must be confident they will not be fired for doing that job well. As nine former inspectors general recently wrote to Congress, “Forcing

¹ Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, *Annual Report to the President and Congress Fiscal Year 2020, Results at a Glance* (2021).

https://www.ignet.gov/sites/default/files/files/FY20_Annual_Report_to_the_President_and_Congress.pdf.pdf

² See, for example, Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General, *Review of Four FISA Applications and Other Aspects of the FBI's Crossfire Hurricane Investigation* (December 2019).

<https://www.justice.gov/storage/120919-examination.pdf>

³ The Department of Defense inspector general, the special inspector general for pandemic recovery, and the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee currently have this authority. 5 U.S.C. App. § 8 (i)(1) (2020).

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/5a/compiledact-95-452/section-8>; 15 U.S.C. § 9053 (2020).

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/15/9053>; Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, Pub. Law No. 116-136, div. B, title V, §15010 (b) (2020). <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/hr748/BILLS-116hr748enr.pdf>

⁴ Letter from CIGIE Legislation Committee Chair Kathy Buller to CIGIE Acting Executive Chairperson 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

⁵ Letter from Senator Chuck Grassley to President Donald Trump asking for his reasons for removing the State Department inspector general, May 18, 2020, 2. <https://www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/grassley-renews-call-trump-comply-ig-removal-statute>

inspectors general to choose between doing their jobs with integrity and keeping their positions is not an acceptable model of governance and oversight.”⁶ The IG Independence and Empowerment Act places reasonable limits on when a president can remove an inspector general and who can serve in the event of a vacancy, and will further insulate the critical oversight offices from politics.

There are many other critical reforms in this comprehensive legislation that have been crafted to address problems with inspector general independence and authority long raised by Congress, civil society, and our inspectors general. We strongly urge Congress to pass this legislation to empower our independent watchdogs to serve the public even more effectively.

Sincerely,

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Common Cause
Demand Progress
Government Accountability Project
Government Information Watch
Mainers for Accountable Leadership
National Security Counselors
Open The Government
Project On Government Oversight (POGO)
Protect Democracy
Public Citizen
Stand Up America
Taxpayers for Common Sense
The Digital Democracy Project

⁶ Letter from nine former inspectors general to congressional leadership about the need to protect inspectors general from unwarranted removal and ensure qualified individuals serve in these offices, May 5, 2020.
<https://www.pogo.org/letter/2020/05/former-inspectors-general-call-on-congress-to-pass-overdue-reforms-to-ig-system/>