

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074  
MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<https://oversight.house.gov>

January 22, 2025

The Honorable Hampton Dellinger  
Special Counsel  
United States Office of Special Counsel  
1100 West 49th Street  
Austin, TX 78756-3199

Dear Special Counsel Dellinger:

We write with appreciation for the important work of the Office of Special Counsel (OSC) and its role as an independent agency that protects federal workers, including whistleblowers, and investigates potential wrongdoing through thorough, transparent, and independent investigations. We invite you to contact Committee Democrats if at any time your independence or transparency is undermined.

The primary mission of OSC is to protect federal employees from prohibited personnel practices, including—and especially—reprisal for whistleblowing. OSC serves as a secure and confidential channel for federal employees to disclose wrongdoing, and it is OSC that investigates alleged wrongdoing and ensures it is corrected.<sup>1</sup> Whistleblowers who come forward with allegations of wrongdoing are critical to ensuring that the federal government runs effectively. Misdeeds that whistleblowers have exposed include wasteful use of funds, inaccurate payments, accounting errors, repeated safety violations, and improper qualification for federal government programs.<sup>2</sup> For example, a former deputy chief of staff at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Kevin Chmielewski, blew the whistle on excessive spending and misuse of taxpayer funds by then-EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt. Mr. Chmielewski was retaliated against for revealing this misconduct when the EPA forced him out of his position.<sup>3</sup> Another whistleblower, Grant Turner, the former Chief Financial Officer at the U.S. Agency for

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Special Counsel, *About OSC* (online at <https://osc.gov/Agency>) (accessed Jan. 9, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Office of Special Counsel, *The U.S. Office of Special Counsel's Role in Protecting Whistleblowers and Serving as a Safe Channel for Government Employees to Disclose Wrongdoing* (online at <https://osc.gov/Documents/PPP/OSC's%20Role/OSC%E2%80%99s%20Role%20in%20Protecting%20Whistleblowers%20and%20Serving%20as%20a%20Safe%20Channel%20for%20Government%20Employees%20to%20Disclose%20Wrongdoing.pdf>) (accessed Jan. 9, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> *EPA Whistleblower Alleges Spending and Travel Excesses by Scott Pruitt*, The Washington Post (Apr. 12, 2018) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/epa-whistleblower-details-spending-and-travel-excesses/2018/04/12/3ea954d4-3e76-11e8-974f-aacd97698cef\\_story.html?\\_pml=1](http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/epa-whistleblower-details-spending-and-travel-excesses/2018/04/12/3ea954d4-3e76-11e8-974f-aacd97698cef_story.html?_pml=1)); *Whistleblower News Network: Former EPA Official Files Whistleblower Retaliation Lawsuit*, Government Accountability Project (Oct. 9, 2020) (online at <https://whistleblower.org/in-the-news/whistleblower-news-network-former-epa-official-files-whistleblower-retaliation-lawsuit/>).

Global Media (USAGM) lost his job after describing how then USAGM CEO Michael Pack politicized the agency's work, compromised its editorial independence, and sidelined those he did not see as loyal.<sup>4</sup> Thanks to courageous federal employees like these whistleblowers, OSC has been able to provide the support necessary to prevent retaliation against whistleblowers, who in turn have a critical role in helping to bring sunlight to issues in the federal government and ensure that agencies are fulfilling their critical missions and public services.

OSC can only do its work if whistleblowers know they are safe to come forward to report misconduct. During his last term, President Trump investigated, publicly attacked, and stripped key protections away from whistleblowers who felt it was their patriotic duty to stand up against abuses of power.<sup>5</sup> For example, President Trump repeatedly lashed out at Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman for informing lawmakers of presidential misconduct during the 2019 impeachment hearings, and later ousted Lt. Col. Vindman from his post at the National Security Council along with his twin brother also serving on the National Security Council staff, Col. Yevgeny Vindman (Ret.).<sup>6</sup> The Department of Defense Inspector General found that "based on a preponderance of evidence" Trump Administration officials retaliated against Col. Vindman.<sup>7</sup> Not only did President Trump retaliate against the Vindman brothers, but he also fired then-Inspector General of the Intelligence Community, Michael Atkinson, for informing Congress of the initial whistleblower complaint which sparked the impeachment inquiry.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Government Accountability Project, *Grant Turner* (online at <https://whistleblower.org/whistleblower-profiles/democracy-whistleblower-profile/grant-turner/>) (accessed Jan. 14, 2025); *Trumpism at Voice of America: Firings, Foosball And A Conspiracy Theory*, NPR (Jan. 27, 2021) (online at [www.npr.org/2021/01/27/959661875/firings-foosball-and-a-conspiracy-theory-trumpism-at-voice-of-america](http://www.npr.org/2021/01/27/959661875/firings-foosball-and-a-conspiracy-theory-trumpism-at-voice-of-america)); *Judge Slaps Down Trump Appointee Who Has Sought to Reshape Voice of America and Related Agencies*, The Washington Post (Nov. 21, 2020) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/media/judge-slaps-down-trump-appointee-who-has-sought-to-reshape-voice-of-america-and-related-agencies/2020/11/21/125d285a-2baa-11eb-92b7-6ef17b3fe3b4\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/media/judge-slaps-down-trump-appointee-who-has-sought-to-reshape-voice-of-america-and-related-agencies/2020/11/21/125d285a-2baa-11eb-92b7-6ef17b3fe3b4_story.html)).

<sup>5</sup> *Leak Investigations Rise 800% Under Jeff Sessions*, The Daily Beast (Nov. 14, 2017) (online at [www.thedailybeast.com/leak-investigations-rise-800-under-jeff-sessions/](http://www.thedailybeast.com/leak-investigations-rise-800-under-jeff-sessions/)); *Trump Again Attacks Whistleblower as Lawmakers Defend His Confidentiality*, Wall Street Journal (Oct. 1, 2019) (online at [www.wsj.com/articles/trump-again-attacks-whistleblower-as-lawmakers-defend-his-confidentiality-11569947053](http://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-again-attacks-whistleblower-as-lawmakers-defend-his-confidentiality-11569947053)); Letter from Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform et. al. to President Donald J. Trump (June 14, 2018) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-oversight.house.gov/files/documents/2018-06-14.EEC%20et%20al%20to%20POTUS-WH%20re%20Executive%20Orders%20on%20Labor.pdf>).

<sup>6</sup> *Trump Attacks on Vindman Trigger Backlash*, The Hill (Oct. 29, 2019) (online at <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/467994-trump-attacks-on-vindman-trigger-backlash/>); *Trump's Attack on Vindman May Violate Whistleblower Protection Laws. But Challenging It Could Be Risky.*, Time (Feb. 12, 2020) (online at <https://time.com/5783160/trumps-attack-on-vindman-may-violate-whistleblower-protection-laws-but-challenging-it-could-be-risky/>).

<sup>7</sup> Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, *Whistleblower Reprisal Investigation: Colonel Yevgeny S. Vindman, U.S. Army* (DODIG-2022-097) (May 18, 2022) (online at [www.dodig.mil/reports.html/Article/3035324/whistleblower-reprisal-investigation-colonel-yevgeny-s-vindman-us-army-dodig-20/](http://www.dodig.mil/reports.html/Article/3035324/whistleblower-reprisal-investigation-colonel-yevgeny-s-vindman-us-army-dodig-20/)).

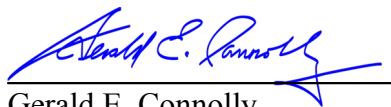
<sup>8</sup> *He Was Told To Be Independent, and Trump Fired Him for It*, Los Angeles Times (Jan. 11, 2021) (online at [www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-01-11/he-was-told-to-be-independent-and-trump-fired-him-for-it](http://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-01-11/he-was-told-to-be-independent-and-trump-fired-him-for-it)).

Independent inspectors general also found that during the Trump Administration, multiple federal agencies undermined the ability of whistleblowers to disclose waste, fraud, and abuse through intimidation and widespread use of nondisclosure agreements.<sup>9</sup> These sorts of systematic attacks on whistleblowers threaten to chill reporting of wrongdoing and make it more difficult for OSC and others to ensure that any waste, fraud, and abuse in the federal government is identified and corrected.

The first Trump Administration also saw rampant abuse of the Hatch Act, which ensures that the federal government is administered in a nonpartisan manner and that federal employees are protected from political coercion in the workplace.<sup>10</sup> As the independent agency responsible for investigating allegations of violations of the Hatch Act and recommending corrective and disciplinary action, OSC is the arbiter that determines whether an executive branch employee used their “official authority or influence for the purpose of interfering with or affecting the result of an election.”<sup>11</sup> OSC must ensure that officials in the next Trump Administration do not use their powerful positions for electoral gain instead of public service.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,



Gerald E. Connolly  
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress

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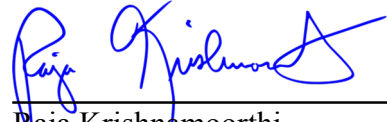
<sup>9</sup> Office of Representative Gerald E. Connolly, *Press Release: Cummings, Connolly Issue Statements on DHS IG Report Showing Trump Administration Fails to Protect Whistleblowers* (Aug. 14, 2018) (online at <https://connolly.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=1449>).

<sup>10</sup> See 5 U.S.C. § 7321.; Letter from Special Counsel Henry J. Kerner, Office of Special Counsel, to President Donald J. Trump (June 13, 2019) (online at <https://osc.gov/Resources/Report%20to%20the%20President%20re%20Kellyanne%20Conway%20Hatch%20Act.pdf>); Committee on Oversight and Reform Democrats, *Press Release: After Oversight Committee Call for Investigation into 2020 RNC Convention, Special Counsel Finds Trump Administration Officials Showed “Willful Disregard” for Hatch Act* (Nov. 9, 2021) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/news/press-releases/after-oversight-committee-call-for-investigation-into-2020-rnc-convention>).

<sup>11</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 7323(a)(1) and 5 U.S.C. § 1216.



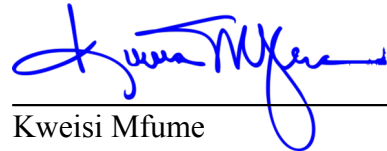
Stephen F. Lynch  
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Raja Krishnamoorthi  
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Ro Khanna  
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Kweisi Mfume  
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Shontel M. Brown  
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Melanie Stansbury  
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Robert Garcia  
Member of Congress



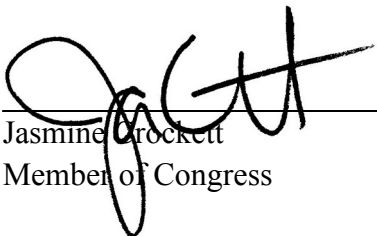
Maxwell Alejandro Frost  
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Summer L. Lee  
Member of Congress



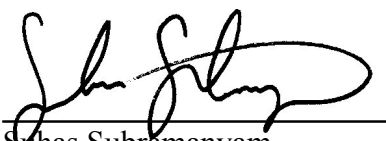
Greg Casar  
Member of Congress



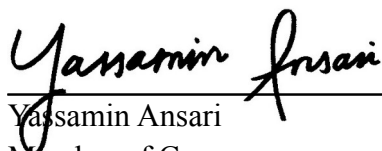
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Emily Randall  
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Suhas Subramanyam  
Member of Congress



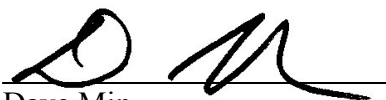
Yassamin Ansari  
Member of Congress



Wesley Bell  
Member of Congress



Lateefah Simon  
Member of Congress



Dave Min  
Member of Congress



Ayanna Pressley  
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman