

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

January 22, 2025

The Honorable Hannibal “Mike” Ware
Chairperson
Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency
1717 H Street, NW, Suite 825
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Inspector General Ware:

We write in support of the critical mission of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) to aid in the establishment and maintenance of a professional, well-trained and highly skilled workforce in the Offices of Inspectors General (OIGs), including conducting independent investigations into allegations of wrongdoing by inspectors general (IGs) and their senior staff. We invite CIGIE to communicate with Committee Democrats if we can be helpful in preserving transparency, accountability, and independence within the IG community.

CIGIE was established in 2008 to act as the primary oversight and coordinative body for federal agency IGs.¹ Established in 1978, IGs provide independent and objective oversight of executive branch operations and combat waste, fraud, and abuse.² In fiscal year 2023 alone, IGs identified \$93.1 billion in potential savings from improved efficiency in government programs, a potential savings of \$26 for every dollar invested.³

During the first Trump Administration, President Trump removed IGs that enforced transparency and accountability that he found to be inconvenient or that exposed his own abuses of power. For example, President Trump targeted Intelligence Community IG Michael Atkinson after he notified Congress that a whistleblower raised concerns about the President’s conduct on a call with officials from Ukraine. During that call, President Trump threatened to withhold lifesaving security assistance until Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy produced derogatory information about President Trump’s political opponent, Joe Biden. This conduct

¹ Congressional Research Service, *Statutory Inspectors General in the Federal Government: A Primer* (Updated Nov. 13, 2023) (online at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/r/r45450>)

² Pub. L. No. 95-452 (1978).

³ Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, *Annual Report to the President and Congress Fiscal Year 2023* (online at www.ignet.gov/sites/default/files/files/CIGIEAnnualReporttothePresidentFY2023_FINAL.pdf) (accessed Jan. 9, 2025).

was the subject of President Trump’s first impeachment.⁴ President Trump also fired the State Department IG when the IG investigated allegations of the misuse of government resources and the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia without congressional approval.⁵

When appointing new IGs, President Trump often left IG positions vacant or picked political appointees at the agencies who already worked at the agency, a clear conflict of interest.⁶ We encourage CIGIE to continue to review and recommend independent and qualified IG candidates to the White House to assist in filling vacancies, something the first Trump Administration struggled to do.⁷

CIGIE is also charged with investigating allegations of misconduct by IGs or other senior officials in the OIGs through CIGIE’s Integrity Committee. The Integrity Committee holds IGs accountable for misconduct and mismanagement. By law, IGs must “immediately” report to Congress any “particularly serious or flagrant” problems or abuses.⁸ Given their role as critical oversight watchdogs safeguarding American tax dollars and preventing abuses of power, IGs must themselves be held to the highest ethical standards.⁹ IGs have to be purer than driven snow in their work and conduct to ensure that they maintain the trust of the agency they oversee, Congress, and most importantly, the American people.¹⁰

CIGIE has proved effective in responding to IG misconduct across administrations without regard for politics or prejudice. For example, on October 2, 2024, CIGIE released findings concluding that Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Inspector General Joseph V. Cuffari “engaged in conduct undermining the independence or integrity reasonably expected of

⁴ *Trump’s Firing of Atkinson Shows Us We Need Independent IGs. Some of His Picks Fall Well Short*, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (Apr. 6, 2020) (online at www.citizensforethics.org/reports-investigations/crew-investigations/trumps-firing-atkinson-independent-inspectors-general/).

⁵ *Trump’s Decision to Fire the State Department’s Watchdog Draws Bipartisan Concern on Capitol Hill*, Government Executive (May 18, 2020) (online at www.govexec.com/oversight/2020/05/trumps-decision-fire-state-departments-watchdog-draws-bipartisan-concern-capitol-hill/165482/).

⁶ *Id*; *New Interior Watchdog Is a Trump Donor with Another IG Job*, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (June 11, 2019) (online at www.citizensforethics.org/reports-investigations/crew-investigations/interior-inspector-general-ennis-trump-donor/).

⁷ *Trump’s Firing of Atkinson Shows Us We Need Independent IGs. Some of His Picks Fall Well Short*, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (Apr. 6, 2020) (online at www.citizensforethics.org/reports-investigations/crew-investigations/trumps-firing-atkinson-independent-inspectors-general/); Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency; *Mission* (online at www.ignet.gov/content/mission-0) (accessed Jan. 15, 2025).

⁸ 5 U.S.C. App. 3, § 5(d).

⁹ *From Sleeping Dogs to Watchdogs: To Ensure Integrity for Our Inspectors General, Congress Must Reform the Integrity Committee*, Project on Government Oversight (Oct. 5, 2022) (online at www.pogo.org/reports/from-sleeping-dogs-to-watchdogs-to-ensure-integrity-for-our-inspectors-general-congress-must-reform-the-integrity-committee).

¹⁰ See Committee on Oversight and Accountability, Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal Workforce, *Press Release: At Subcommittee Hearing, Democrats Highlight Importance of Maintaining Independence of Inspectors General* (July 25, 2024) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/news/press-releases/subcommittee-hearing-democrats-highlight-importance-maintaining-independence>).

his position.”¹¹ The Integrity Committee found that Inspector General Cuffari lied to Congress during his confirmation, misrepresented his role in an investigation while serving as DHS IG, and engaged in a gross waste of taxpayer funds.¹² The Integrity Committee also referred three additional allegations to President Biden that it did not investigate because of doubts that Inspector General Cuffari would cooperate, and concern that further investigation would delay the publication of the substantiated allegations.¹³

In another instance, in May 2024, the IG overseeing the Social Security Administration—Gail Ennis—resigned following a multi-year investigation into an anti-fraud program the agency oversaw that issued extraordinary fines on disabled and elderly people accused of disability benefit fraud. CIGIE’s Integrity Committee found that Inspector General Ennis obstructed its investigation by refusing interviews, ordering subordinates and witnesses to limit the Integrity Committee’s access to information, and even seeking to mislead investigators.¹⁴

In May 2021, the Inspector General overseeing the Federal Housing Finance Agency—Laura Wertheimer—resigned after the Integrity Committee found that she abused her authority, retaliated against employees, and refused to cooperate with the Integrity Committee’s investigation. Specifically, the Integrity Committee found that Inspector General Wertheimer “showed a disdain and resistance towards Congressional and Integrity Committee oversight by fostering a culture of witness intimidation through a pattern of staff abuse and fear of retaliation.”¹⁵

¹¹ Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, Integrity Committee, *Report of Findings for Integrity Committee Case 20-059* (Oct. 2, 2024) (IC20-059) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-oversight.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2024-10-02-IC20-059-Letter-to-the-President-Redacted-w-Encls.pdf>); Committee on Oversight and Accountability, *Press Release: Ranking Members Raskin and Thompson Call for Removal of Inspector General Cuffari Following Damning Report* (Oct. 3, 2024) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/news/press-releases/ranking-members-raskin-and-thompson-call-removal-inspector-general-cuffari>).

¹² Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, Integrity Committee, *Report of Findings for Integrity Committee Case 20-059* (Oct. 2, 2024) (IC20-059) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-oversight.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2024-10-02-IC20-059-Letter-to-the-President-Redacted-w-Encls.pdf>).

¹³ *Id.* The report alleged that Inspector General Cuffari and a DHS OIG senior executive “diminished and delayed reports regarding sexual harassment at DHS and domestic abuse by DHS personnel,” and “failed to timely and adequately disclose to Congress the Secret Service’s deletion of text messages that were potentially relevant to Congress’ January 6th investigation,” and that Inspector General Cuffari “deleted his own work-related text messages and one of his senior executives failed to report that fact to National Archives and Records Administration.”

¹⁴ *Embattled Social Security Watchdog to Resign After Tumultuous Tenure*, Washington Post (May 31, 2024) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/05/31/social-security-watchdog-gail-ennis-resigns/); *Former Social Security Watchdog Abused Her Authority, Investigation Finds* (July 5, 2024) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/07/05/gail-ennis-social-security-abused-authority-report/); Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, *Report of Findings for Integrity Committee Case 22-048* (June 21, 2024) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/documents/d7ae26dd-47e6-44be-a36a-b6bdc5b3cd62.pdf?itid=lk_inline_manual_2).


¹⁵ *Inspector General Overseeing Federal Housing Agency Resigns, Months After Watchdog Report Finds Abuse of Authority*, Washington Post (June 30, 2021) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2021/06/30/fhfa-inspector-general-resigns-laura-wertheimer/); *READ:*

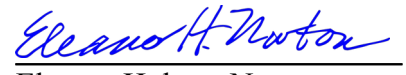
CIGIE’s work to ensure that IGs are accountable to the federal employees they supervise, the agencies they oversee, and ultimately the American taxpayers is essential to a functional, accountable, democratic government. This is of particular relevance when the presidential administration in power is hostile to federal oversight and the independence of IGs.

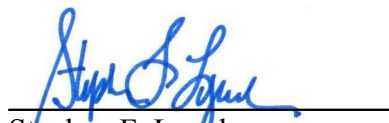
CIGIE’s efforts to ensure that IGs implement consistent standards and do not abuse their positions of authority is more important than ever. CIGIE is critical to helping IGs effectively carry out its mission to fight against waste, fraud, and abuse, as well as mismanagement and malfeasance. We look forward to working closely with CIGIE and the entire IG community as you carry out diligent, independent oversight and hold those in power accountable. We invite you to contact the Committee Democrats at any time if you believe your independence is threatened or undermined.


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 Democratic staff at (202) 225-5051. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.


Sincerely,

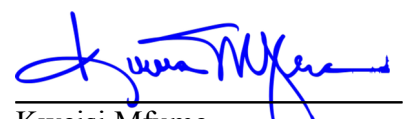

Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress


Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress


Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress

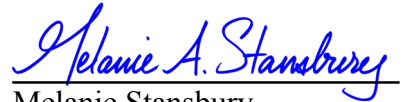

Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress


Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

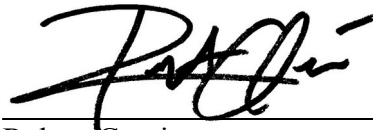

Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress



Shontel M. Brown
Member of Congress



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



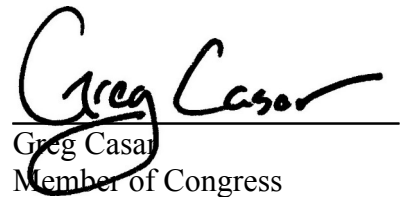
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Member of Congress




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