



May 21, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Gary Peters
724 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Grassley and Peters:

On behalf of National Taxpayers Union (NTU) and R Street Institute, we write to thank you for introducing S. 587, the Securing Inspector General Independence Act of 2021.¹ This legislation would help protect and enhance the federal inspectors general (IG) system that safeguards taxpayer dollars from waste, fraud, and abuse.

IGs have played a critical role in federal oversight since the passage of the Inspector General Act of 1978, and in that time have come under political fire from both Republican and Democratic presidential administrations.² Fortunately, thanks to leaders like yourselves, IGs have typically enjoyed bipartisan support even when investigating and reporting politically inconvenient truths in the sprawling executive branch.

Unfortunately, IG protections have not kept pace with the scale and scope of both political and policy challenges facing the federal government. Congress has approved more spending in the past year than in any year prior due to the COVID-19 pandemic,³ and in recent years IGs have faced unique and significant challenges to their ability to conduct their work in a politically independent and even-handed manner.⁴

The Securing Inspector General Independence Act of 2021 would enhance IG protections by:

- Requiring Presidents to report, in a timely manner, more information to Congress than under current law when an IG is removed from their post or placed on non-duty status;
- Ensuring that, in most cases, any vacancies for an IG position are filled by a first assistant to the IG who is qualified for the position; and
- Requiring enhanced education in IG offices for how employees should handle whistleblower complaints that are *internal* to an Office of Inspector General.

¹ Congress.gov. (Introduced March 4, 2021). "S.587 - Securing Inspector General Independence Act of 2021." Retrieved from: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/587/> (Accessed May 18, 2021.)

² For more on the history of the IG Act and political interference with IGs, see: Hempowicz, Liz. "Strengthening Government Watchdogs." Project on Government Oversight, April 20, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.pogo.org/testimony/2021/04/strengthening-government-watchdogs/> (Accessed May 18, 2021.)

³ Konkel, Frank. "Federal Government Blows Past Record Spending in Fiscal 2020." *NextGov*, October 19, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.nextgov.com/cio-briefing/2020/10/federal-government-blows-past-record-spending-fiscal-2020/169358/> (Accessed May 18, 2021.)

⁴ Kirby, Jen. "Trump's purge of inspectors general, explained." *Vox*, May 28, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.vox.com/2020/5/28/21265799/inspectors-general-trump-linick-atkinson> (Accessed May 18, 2021.)

We especially appreciate that these provisions would also apply to the Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery (SIGPR), who will play a critical role in overseeing the disbursement of trillions of dollars in federal spending to respond to COVID-19. With concerning stories of fraud in the enhanced unemployment insurance (UI) system⁵ and the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP),⁶ more government oversight is sorely needed and it is needed immediately.

In short, thank you for introducing the Securing Inspector General Independence Act of 2021. NTU and R Street are pleased to endorse this bill, and we look forward to working with you and your colleagues to ensure enhanced IG protections are enacted into law this year.

Sincerely,

Andrew Lautz
Director of Federal Policy
National Taxpayers Union

Jonathan Bydlak
Director, Governance; Resident Senior Fellow
R Street Institute

CC: The Honorable Rob Portman
The Honorable Tom Carper
The Honorable James Lankford
The Honorable Maggie Hassan
The Honorable Mitt Romney
The Honorable Jon Tester
The Honorable Susan Collins
The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
The Honorable Roger Wicker
The Honorable Kyrsten Sinema
The Honorable Joni Ernst
The Honorable Mark Warner

⁵ Iacurci, Greg. "Scammers have taken \$36 billion in fraudulent unemployment payments from American workers." *CNBC*, January 5, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/01/05/scammers-have-taken-36-billion-in-fraudulent-unemployment-payments-.html> (Accessed May 18, 2021.)

⁶ Gregg, Aaron. "Justice Department charges 57 people attempting to steal \$175 million in coronavirus relief funds." *The Washington Post*, September 10, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/09/10/ppp-fraud-charges/> (Accessed May 18, 2021.)