United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 14, 2020

VIA EMAIL

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump,

As you know, Inspectors General ("IG") are the front line defense in protecting American taxpayer dollars. They are tasked with ensuring that our government agencies are effective and efficient. This is always an important role, but especially so with the Coronavirus pandemic. Every dollar wasted or stolen is a dollar not going to save small businesses, protect our health care workers, or provide assistance to those who need it most. IGs also give the executive branch and Congress insight into how to generally improve agency operations, a critical role during these difficult times.

Over time, Congress has established 75 IGs across the federal government and given them broad powers to investigate and audit federal agencies. Recent statements and actions in the administration have raised concerns on Capitol Hill and among the IG community about the administration's support for IGs and the statutory authorities Congress has granted them. We want to work with your administration to ensure that IGs continue to play their important and appropriate role. We offer the following suggestions:

IGs must be confirmed. Effective oversight requires strong leadership. The ability for an IG office to function at full capacity is diminished without a confirmed leader. The temporary nature of an IG serving in an "acting" capacity prevents that official from fully executing his or her responsibilities. In September 2019, we joined our colleagues on the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee in urging you to nominate or appoint qualified candidates to serve in vacant IG positions. We renew that request today and offer our help in identifying qualified candidates.

IGs must be independent. To properly execute statutory responsibilities, IGs must maintain independence. Congress has made clear that IGs are not under the supervision of the head of their agency. This ensures that IGs avoid any conflicts of interest during an audit or investigation. IGs must be absolutely nonpartisan and objective in their findings, which translates to effective recommendations for

changes to better serve the administration and taxpayers. We would hope the White House would view IGs as your partners in objectively identifying and rooting out waste within the federal government.

IGs must be empowered. Congress has given IGs broad statutory authority to conduct audits and investigations. This responsibility could not be more important following the appropriation of the largest economic relief package in American history. We must ensure these funds are spent properly and distributed fairly, and that they provide the needed support to individuals, the healthcare industry, and the business community. IGs will play a crucial role in ensuring these funds are not misappropriated or abused. This includes working with and protecting whistleblowers, who play a key role in assisting IGs identify waste, fraud, and abuse. To help IGs do their job effectively, we believe your administration should provide them with full access to appropriately requested documents and witnesses to properly conduct audits and investigations.

Congress depends on IGs. IGs are also required to keep Congress fully and currently informed about issues within the executive branch. In reviewing federal programs, Congress expects IGs to provide honest and unbiased assessments. These assessments inform future legislation to remedy programs that are wasteful or broken. IG recommendations for improvement should be seen as constructive ways to address problems and inefficiencies so that the federal government better serves the American taxpayer.

We want to work with you to ensure that the enemy is wasteful government spending, not IGs. We encourage you to send a strong message to the executive branch to work *with* IGs, not against them. With trillions of taxpayer dollars being distributed and a national debt of $24 trillion (and counting), this is a time to encourage IGs to root out waste and inefficiency.

We are encouraged that your new Chief of Staff, Mark Meadows, is a strong supporter of IGs and was a key sponsor of the Inspector General Empowerment Act of 2016. We stand ready to help your administration confirm qualified IG candidates and address recommendations from agency IGs to ensure the federal government effectively serves the American taxpayer.

Sincerely,

Rob Portman
U.S. Senator

James Lankford
U.S. Senator