

**Testimony Concerning Restoring Public Availability of Final Reports  
from the House of Representatives Office of Inspector General  
Submitted by Taylor J. Swift, Senior Policy Advisor with Demand  
Progress for the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the  
Legislative Branch for Fiscal Year 2024**

Dear Chair Amodei, Ranking Member Espaillat, and Members of the House Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Taylor J. Swift and I am a senior policy advisor with Demand Progress, a non-profit organization focused on improving how our government operates, with a particular focus on the Legislative branch. My testimony concerns restoring public availability of final reports from the House of Representatives Office of Inspector General.

Federal inspectors general (IGs) are independent offices inside an agency focused on protecting the integrity of our government. They detect waste, fraud, and abuse, promote economy and effectiveness, and conduct independent and objective audits and investigations. Congress established the Executive branch inspector general system in 1978 and it includes at least 74 federal inspector general offices. There are six additional Legislative branch inspectors general: five in Legislative branch agencies and one in the House of Representatives.

A key requirement for Executive branch inspectors general is that most of their final reports are made publicly available, a requirement that inconsistently extends to some Legislative branch inspectors general. Under the *Inspector General Empowerment Act of 2016*, covered IGs are required to publish online, within three days, reports that contain recommendations for corrective action.<sup>1</sup> In circumstances where an IG report cannot be released (in whole or in part) — usually due to its classified nature — the best practice is that the IG provides notification of the report online.

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<sup>1</sup> P. L. No. 114-317 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/6450>

Inspector General reports can be found on individual IG websites and the vast majority are aggregated onto [oversight.gov](https://www.oversight.gov), a website run by the statutorily-established Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE).<sup>2</sup> Centralized publication of reports provides everyone the ability to easily access the reports and identify trends across agencies. Some Legislative branch agency IGs participate in CIGIE, including the Architect of the Capitol, the U.S. Capitol Police, the Government Accountability Office, the Government Publishing Office, and the Library of Congress. (While the Architect of the Capitol, Government Accountability Office, Government Publishing Office, and Library of Congress publish reports on CIGIE, the Capitol Police do not publish their reports online, although we believe they should.)<sup>3</sup>

The House of Representatives Office of Inspector General (House IG) is unusual in a number of respects. The House of Representatives created the House IG in 1992 in the wake of the House Post Office and banking scandals to provide periodic reports on audits of House officers.<sup>4</sup> It is established under the House Rules, with the Inspector General jointly appointed by the Speaker, the Majority Leader, and the Minority Leader each Congress, and the IG is subject to the policy direction of the Committee on House Administration. Its responsibilities include providing audit, investigative, and advisory services to the House in a manner consistent with government-wide standards.

Reports from the House IG were made publicly available for more than a dozen years of its existence. According to our research, from 1992 until 2005, the House IG routinely published its reports online.<sup>5</sup> We were able to find and catalog 119 reports published on the IG website from the period of May 1995 to December 2006. From

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<sup>2</sup> See, <https://www.oversight.gov/>

<sup>3</sup> See Testimony of Daniel Schuman, Policy Director Demand Progress Education Fund, Before the Committee on House Administration “Oversight of the January 6th Capitol Attack: Ongoing Review of the United States Capitol Police Inspector General Flash Reports” (February 17, 2022) <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/HA/HA00/20220217/114404/HHRG-117-HA00-Wstate-SchumanD-20220217.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> See, *Office of the House of Representatives Inspector General*, Congressional Research Service, R 40133 (January 18, 2013) [https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20130118\\_R40133\\_fe7d516f1fe2f51d8afcdb393c4088edbe015c24.pdf](https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20130118_R40133_fe7d516f1fe2f51d8afcdb393c4088edbe015c24.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *The House Office of Inspector General Should Publish Information About Its Reports*, Daniel Schuman, Demand Progress (December 10, 2018), <https://firstbranchforecast.com/2018/12/10/the-house-office-of-inspector-general-should-publish-information-about-its-reports/>

2005-2007, the House IG stopped posting reports with “security implications,” a term that was not defined, and in 2007, the House IG stopped publishing new reports on its website altogether. In 2009, the House IG removed all reports issued prior to September 2003 off its website. In 2014, the House IG launched a new website that did not include previous reports. Currently, the House IG only has six reports on its website: House Financial Audits for 2016-2021.<sup>6</sup> Using the Internet Archives’ Wayback Machine, we were able to identify and download many of those historical reports.

The topics of the reports we found on the Wayback Machine were typical of the work of an inspector general:

The bulk of reports concerned the following topics: a review of computer, data, and internet systems (40 reports); annual financial audits and related analysis (25 reports); and payment related issues including the financial management system, contracting flaws, and vendor fraud (14 reports).

The remaining reports concerned legislative branch offices like the Chief Administrative Officer, Architect of the Capitol, Clerk, and Sergeant at Arms as well as the operations of Legislative branch facilities, such as the beauty shop, gift shop, office supply store, parking garages, recording studio, and more.

Transparency concerning the findings of a House IG is crucial to the success of the office. The publication of reports alerts stakeholders to the existence of a report and provides weight and urgency to the IG’s findings. Entities under review find it harder to dismiss or ignore the findings of IGs when the circulation of those findings are not limited. Conversely, the public identification and exposure of wrongdoing is a deterrent to future bad behavior. Finally, the findings of an IG in a series of reports over time helps to surface a pattern and practice of maladministration or other dysfunctional behaviors. Altogether, this is why reports from IGs from across the government are routinely made

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<sup>6</sup> See, <https://www.house.gov/the-house-explained/officers-and-organizations/inspector-general>

publicly available. One welcome consequence, according to a 2016 analysis, is that the mean annual return on investment to funding for an inspector general is 13:1.<sup>7</sup>

We know this committee values the role of inspectors general inside the Legislative branch, as indicated by its FY23 request for GAO to produce a report on IG oversight coverage gaps inside the Legislative branch.<sup>8</sup> That report will include “recommendations around structures and best practices that can enhance oversight within the Legislative Branch.” That report, however, is not due until June 21, 2023, so it may be helpful to consult with GAO regarding its preliminary findings. The GAO also is a case in point, as it has published its reports online for decades, as well as listed its classified reports that it cannot publish, and is well known as an agency that returns significant value to taxpayers.

We recommend the House of Representatives direct the House of Representatives Inspector General to return to its earlier best practice of publishing its IG reports online in accordance with the best practices followed by other federal inspectors general. Further, we urge the House to authorize the House IG to fully participate in CIGIE, which will allow it to engage in a community of practice for IGs, and also includes publishing its reports on oversight.gov. Finally, we recommend the House to direct the IG to review all its prior reports, publish the names and dates of those reports online immediately, and over the next one year publish its historical reports online in accordance with the best practices followed by Executive branch IGs.

Accordingly, we recommend the following language be included in the committee’s report:

*House IG Report Transparency.* The House of Representatives Office of Inspector General performs important oversight work. It is a best practice for federal inspectors general to publish their final reports online, a practice that the House IG previously followed and should reinstitute. Starting in the 118th Congress, the House IG should make available online within three days of

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<sup>7</sup> *Sometimes cutting budgets raise deficits: The curious case of inspectors’ general return on investment*, John Hudak and Grace Wallack, Brookings Institution (2016),

<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/CEPMHudakWallackOIG.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> See, Legislative Branch Appropriations, 2023 Committee Report (H. Rept. 117-389, p. 6),

<https://www.congress.gov/117/crpt/hrpt389/CRPT-117hrpt389.pdf#page=6>

completion of its final IG reports in accordance with best practices for IGs. Should a report be unable to be published, the name of the report, the date issued, and a summary that reasonably describes its contents should be made publicly available. In addition, the House IG should make available online any House IG reports that were previously publicly available. The House IG is authorized to fully participate in Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE), and it should publish all IG reports that have ever been made publicly available on CIGIE's website [oversight.gov](https://oversight.gov).

Furthermore, starting within 90 days of the Committee's adoption of this report and set for completion within one year, the House IG shall make available on a public-facing website all of its existing but non-public reports, subject to the following limitations: In accordance with best practices for federal IGs, to the extent some or all information contained in a report must not be made publicly available because the information contained is classified or sensitive, the House IG may refrain from publishing that information online. However, such a withholding must be limited to the maximum extent possible. In the unusual instance where a report is withheld in its entirety, the Committee expects publication on the IG's publicly accessible website the following information: report title, date of publication, a summary that reasonably describes its contents, and a general reason for non-publication of the full report.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.