

**Statement of Congressman Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)**  
**Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**  
***Full Committee Business Meeting***  
**Thursday, July 14, 2022**

I thank Chairwoman Maloney for bringing these important pieces of legislation to the Committee's attention today, including my bill, the Strengthening Tools to Obstruct and Prevent Fraud Act of 2022 (H.R. 8322), which seeks to reduce improper payments and fraud. I am also proud to cosponsor the Improving Digital Identity Act; the Restoring a Fair and Accurate Census Act; and the Justice in Power Plant Permitting Act. These bills seek to improve digital identity verification, enhance the Census Bureau's independence and data collection abilities, and advance the equitable transition to a clean energy economy, respectively.

***H.R. 8322, the Strengthening Tools to Obstruct and Prevent Fraud Act of 2022***

As the sponsor of H.R. 8322, the Strengthening Tools to Obstruct and Prevent Fraud Act of 2022, I seek to remove unnecessary federal agency compliance requirements, reduce improper payments, and incentivize the use of data analytics and other tools to proactively prevent waste, fraud, and abuse.

My bill, also known as the STOP Fraud Act, would establish a dedicated antifraud office, known as the Federal Real Antifraud Unified Directorate (FRAUD), within the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The Office would assist agencies in using best practices to prevent and reduce fraud and provide technical support to all agencies to help them create outcome-focused initiatives that save taxpayer dollars. The bill would also establish an online, public dashboard to track cost savings, cost avoidance, and burden reduction for those who qualify for federal program funding.

This legislation would set new, clearer standards for designating programs as high risk or low risk for fraud and improper payments. It would require agencies operating programs with a high fraud risk to implement proactive, preventative, and analytics-driven programs to prepare for, detect, and respond to fraud threats. Agencies must demonstrate meaningful progress in reducing their improper payments over a two-year period. Finally, this bill would require agencies with programs that have a low fraud risk to identify and develop at least one data analytics project aimed at reducing fraud and improper payments in those programs.

To incentivize agencies, the bill would authorize them to retain and reinvest a portion of dollars retrieved through anti-fraud activities in technologies and activities related to preventing and combating fraud and reducing improper payments.

***H.R. 4258, the Improving Digital Identity Act***

As a cosponsor of H.R. 4258, the Improving Digital Identity Act, I understand the importance of modernizing and securing federal identification systems to allow individuals to access the goods and services they need. The bill creates the Improving Digital Identity Task Force (Task Force) and would act as a governmental commission. The Task Force would be designed to protect and verify public and private sectors digital identities by identifying

government entities that issue or possess information related to personal identity, and then assess these agencies' capabilities to contribute to coordinated, improved processes for identity verification

Pursuant to the legislation, a presidentially appointed director would lead the Task Force, which is comprised of representatives from federal, state, and local government. The Task Force would be required to issue recommendations to improve digital identity verification services, in the public and private sectors, in ways that enhance security and privacy while prioritizing consumer consent. It would also assess the risks associated with digital identity verification. Finally, the bill would establish a program at the Department of Homeland Security to provide innovation grants to states to support the development of secure, interoperable identity credentialing systems used in digital identity verification.

### ***H.R. 7602, the Preventing Organizational Conflicts of Interest in Federal Acquisition Act***

H.R. 7602, the Preventing Organizational Conflicts of Interest in Federal Acquisition Act, would update and strengthen government contractors' organizational conflicts of interest (OCIs) governing rules. The bill would also require regulatory updates to the definitions, rules, and contract clauses governing OCIs that apply to the procurements of almost all executive agencies through the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR). In addition, the bill would revise the FAR by

- defining organizational conflicts of interest, including specified contractor relationships;
- providing executive agencies with solicitation and contract provisions that require contractors to disclose information relevant to potential organizational conflicts of interest and limit future contracting with respect to those potential conflicts; and
- requiring executive agencies to establish or update agency conflict of interest procedures to implement these FAR revisions and address agency-specific conflict of interest issues.

### ***H.R. 8326, the Ensuring a Fair and Accurate Census Act***

As a cosponsor of H.R. 8326, the Ensuring a Fair and Accurate Census Act, I support an independent, fair, and accurate Census. This bill instills transparency into the budgetary and operational planning of the Census Bureau by requiring five-year projections with every submitted budget. The Secretary of Commerce would also be required to submit Census Bureau's budget request concurrently to the House Oversight and Reform Committee, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, and both the House and Budget and Appropriations Committees, when they transmit it to the President. In addition, the Secretary would be required to biannually submit a report to Congress on the operational plans for the next decennial census.

Taken together, these measures promote accountability and would vest operational decisions solely with the Director of the Census Bureau. The bill also requires that any qualifying candidate for the Deputy Director of the Bureau position have demonstrated relevant career experience and technical expertise. The bill would also permit the Census Bureau to have

no more than three political appointees and would codify the Census Bureau’s advisory committees—including those on statistical and scientific standards. Lastly, the Secretary of Commerce would certify that any new questions on a decennial census meet best practices standards—with subsequent GAO review of the Secretary’s certification.

***H.R. 8325, the Preventing Personal Conflicts of Interest in Federal Acquisition Act***

H.R. 8325, the Preventing Personal Conflicts of Interest in Federal Acquisition Act, would expand the current rules governing personal conflicts of interest (PCIs). Specifically, the bill would extend coverage to contractors’ employees who support the regulatory, policymaking, and adjudicative functions of an executive agency, as well as other key functions with increased risks of conflicts. In addition, the bill would prohibit contractors from advising an executive agency on sensitive matters while concurrently working with entities the agency regulates; require these contractors to disclose their recent work for clients that the agency regulates; and set civil penalties for certain violations of these rules.

***H.R. 6548, the Justice in Power Plant Permitting Act***

As a cosponsor of H.R. 6548, the Justice in Power Plant Permitting Act, I am committed to an efficient transition to clean energy sources to mitigate our climate crisis. If passed, this bill would direct state permitting authorities to follow a new Clean Air Act permitting and oversight requirement when considering major sources of air pollution, as well as smaller sources within a mile of a large emitter. The bill would also establish a \$10 billion Just Energy Transition Fund to support clean energy projects to replace plants that cannot be permitted or re-permitted under the new law.

The Committee will consider Section 3 of the bill, which would ensure that the federal government is a partner in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and hazardous air pollutants by requiring it to use 100% renewable, air pollution-free energy by 2030. The bill would accomplish this goal by amending the federal purchasing requirement for renewable energy in Section 203 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, and by prioritizing the transition to air pollution-free renewable energy in susceptible subpopulations or environmental justice communities. Section 3 would also authorize federal agencies to enter contracts for air pollution-free renewable energy sources or battery storage powered by such renewable energy sources.