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EXCLUSIVE POLICY

Inspector General Says Kristi Noem's DHS Has 'Systematically Obstructed' Its Work

Letter outlines 11 instances of agency allegedly blocking information, including in criminal inquiry

By [Tarini Parti](#) [Follow](#) and [Josh Dawsey](#) [Follow](#)

March 3, 2026 6:04 pm ET



Department of Homeland Security Inspector General Joseph Cuffari on Capitol Hill in July. JONATHAN ERNST/REUTERS

Quick Summary

- The Department of Homeland Security's inspector general said the agency has systematically obstructed its work.

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The inspector general for the Department of Homeland Security said the agency's leaders had "systematically obstructed" its work, including in a federal criminal investigation, according to a copy of a letter viewed by The Wall Street Journal.

In the letter to lawmakers dated Monday, the inspector general outlines 11 instances that he says the department had blocked his office from accessing records and information it needed to pursue its inquiries. He said DHS's refusal to cooperate in the criminal investigation, which he said had national security implications, was "particularly egregious."

The inspector general's letter briefly came up as Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem [testified before a Senate panel](#) on Tuesday. North Carolina GOP Sen. Thom Tillis held it up as an example of the secretary's failures in managing the department.

"Does anybody have any idea how bad it has to be for the OIG in this agency to come out and do this publicly?," Tillis said, referring to the office of the inspector general. "That is stonewalling, that's a failure of leadership, and that is why I've called for your resignation."

The inspector general, Joseph Cuffari, was appointed in the first Trump administration, and the letter was sent to a swath of congressional committees.

In the letter, Cuffari said he had asked last April for access to a database controlled by DHS in connection with a criminal investigation. According to the watchdog, DHS proposed conditions on accessing the database that would require the inspector general's office "to reveal details of the investigation to individuals who do not have a need to know, and who may be related somehow to the allegations or individuals under investigation."

It wasn't immediately clear what the federal investigation was about, and the letter didn't say.

In a response attached to the letter, DHS general counsel James Percival disputed the allegations. He said that Cuffari hadn't provided the department with information it needed in order to provide access to specific databases. Percival also warned that alerting lawmakers would be seen as "in bad faith and bordering on material misrepresentation to Congress."

A spokeswoman for DHS said the inspector general hadn't detailed the scope of its inquiry, which the spokeswoman said was a requirement to grant access to the relevant classified databases. "We have told him this repeatedly in every meeting, the ball rests fully in the OIG's court," the spokeswoman said.



Kristi Noem, secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on Tuesday. GRAEME SLOAN/BLOOMBERG NEWS

A spokesman for the inspector general said that the office tried to resolve its access issues and informed Congress, as required by law, when it couldn't reach an agreement. The letter noted that agencies can't withhold records from federal criminal investigators the way people sometimes can.

In the same letter, the inspector general also said that DHS had stymied its ability to work on a project related to the Secret Service in the aftermath of the assassination attempt on President Trump in Butler, Pa. in 2024. The letter said that project was aimed at assessing how the Secret Service identifies, receives, disseminates and operationalizes intelligence concerning threats to the officials it protects.

The letter is an element of an ongoing dispute between the agency and the inspector general.

In [another letter sent to Congress in February](#), the inspector general said DHS had refused to address any of its "significant" findings around airport security checkpoints that it flagged for Noem in a classified report, the Journal previously reported.

The report found that Noem and DHS had created security vulnerabilities by waiving a requirement that passengers remove their shoes at security screenings before flying.

Asked about the policy during Tuesday's hearing, Noem said the inspector general's classified report included flawed data and that the department had implemented its recommendations.

Although the February letter from the inspector general to congressional committees stated that neither DHS nor the Transportation Security Administration had responded to address the substance of their concerns, Noem testified that her department had communicated those details to the inspector general.

Appeared in the March 4, 2026, print edition as 'Watchdog: DHS Obstructed Its Work'.

Tarini Parti is a White House reporter at The Wall Street Journal. She can be reached on Signal at the username tparti.37.

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Josh Dawsey is a political investigations and enterprise reporter for The Wall Street Journal. He most recently worked as a political enterprise and investigations reporter for the Washington Post. He joined the Post in 2017 and previously covered the White House.

Josh was part of a team of journalists who won the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in 2022 for the newspaper's coverage of Jan. 6 and won the 2024 Pulitzer...

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