

January 18, 2024

The Honorable Gary Peters, Chair
The Honorable Rand Paul
Ranking Member
Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee
724 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Peters and Ranking Member Paul:

The bi-partisan taxpayer and good government organizations below write to urge action on S. 1524, the bi-partisan Expanding Contract Whistleblower Rights Act. Our views reflect those from a petition by 163 stakeholder organizations submitted previously. Action remains a high priority for us, most especially because misspending concerns regularly threaten government shutdowns. There should be no partisan debates about strengthening the weapons against fraud, waste and abuse. This legislation can make a difference through maintenance of an outdated law that made a difference before.

More effective accountability for contracts must be a top priority, because the amount of spending is so immense. Contractors typically have received over \$600 billion annually in taxpayer funds for a 4-7 million-person labor force, over twice that of the civil service. Since the pandemic that bonanza has skyrocketed with over \$4 trillion in new spending. All parties and ideologies should agree that this spending must be an investment in addressing serious national impacts, rather than an opportunity for special interests to exploit.

It is beyond credible debate that whistleblowers are the most effective resource against misspending and corruption. Shielded by what then were best practice whistleblower rights, they were credited with a significant role in minimizing misspending under the 2009 stimulus law. But all pioneer good government laws need regular maintenance based on lessons learned and frustration of congressional intent, or they no longer have significant impact. Unfortunately, the recent spending surge did not update contractor whistleblower laws that have severely been weakened over the last decade by hostile interpretations that canceled congressional intent. Special interests have exploited this vulnerability. Last Year the Justice Department Inspector General conservatively estimated \$100 billion in fraud from the pandemic law alone.

S. 1524 should be a noncontroversial way to stop the bleeding. Stakeholders have agreed not to challenge withdrawal of language that would expand whistleblower rights to retaliatory litigation. The remaining provisions are the regular upkeep necessary for any remedial laws to stay relevant. The provisions reinforce statutory language for parity with the civil service Whistleblower Protection Act or close enforcement loopholes contrary to original intent. The only provision expanding rights is to protect whistleblowing contractors from retaliation, instead of just their employees.

This legislation is supported by and includes provisions from the Committee of Inspectors General for Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE). The only opponents are those contractors who seek to

avoid accountability. We urge the Committee to side with the taxpayers and approve S. 1524 without further delay. Mending America's leaky shield against fraud, waste and abuse is overdue.

Sincerely,

EMPOWER

Government Accountability Project

National Taxpayers Union

Project on Government Oversight

Public Citizen

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

Taxpayers for Common Sense

Taxpayer Protection Alliance

Whistleblower of America