

The Honorable Tom Carper
Chairman, Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee
513 Hart Senate Office Building

The Honorable Dr. Tom Coburn
Ranking Member, Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee
172 Russell Senate Office Building

November 5, 2013

BY EMAIL

Re: The Digital Accountability and Transparency Act

Dear Senators Carper and Coburn:

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing in strong support of the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (DATA Act), S. 994, as introduced by Senators Warner and Portman. The DATA Act is an important step toward true federal spending transparency as it empowers the public to see how their tax dollars are being used.

Currently, data on federal spending is incomplete, inconsistent, and difficult for the public to access. All too often, the federal government fails to publish crucial spending data at all -- or publishes such data in formats that are not interoperable or are otherwise difficult to use, impeding public access and analysis.

The DATA Act would address these problems. It directs the Treasury Department to create data standards for tracking and reporting government-wide spending, including requiring agencies to use consistent identifiers for entities and publish data in machine-readable formats. These data standards would, for the first time, permit government-wide data searches, comparability, and quality checks. In turn, this would put pressure on agencies to make sure the data they release is accurate and timely.

The DATA Act will also expand the scope of the USASpending.gov portal to include internal expenditures (in addition to external grants and contracts that are already reported) and full payment-level detail (not just the summaries currently available). Finally, the federal government would catch up to foreign countries, such as Brazil and Slovenia, and state and local governments (such as Texas and New York City) that already provide such detailed spending data to their citizens so that they can see what's happening at the payment level.

The DATA Act has bipartisan support in the Senate and the House of Representatives. The current version of the bill was simultaneously introduced in both chambers by Senator Mark Warner (D-VA) and Representative Darrell Issa (R-CA) and cosponsored by Senator Rob Portman (R-OH) and Representative Elijah Cummings (D-MD). In the House, the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform unanimously referred the legislation for consideration by the full chamber on May 22nd.

November 5, 2013

Page Two

The DATA Act will improve the transparency of our government to its citizens and modernize our government's ability to manage itself. Fully implemented, it empowers agencies and their inspectors general to deploy data analytics to hone in on waste and abuse, potentially deterring it before it occurs. We urge the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee to consider and approve this legislation.

For more information, please contact Daniel Schuman, policy director of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, at dschuman@citizensforethics.org or 202-408-5565.

Sincerely,

Americans for Tax Reform
Association of Research Libraries
Big Data Coalition
Californians Aware
Center for Effective Government
Center for Responsive Politics
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Council for Citizens Against Government Waste
Craig Newmark
Data Transparency Coalition
Digital Liberty
Enterprise Data Management Council Inc.
Government Accountability Project (GAP)
The Public Notice
iSolon.org
Liberty Coalition
NanoBCA
National Priorities Project
Object Management Group, Inc.
OpenTheGovernment.org
StockSmart
Sunlight Foundation
Understanding Government
Water Innovations Alliance Foundation
World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)

cc:

The Honorable Mark Warner
475 Russell Senate Office Building

The Honorable Rob Portman
448 Russell Senate Office Building