



CITIZENS FOR
RESPONSIBILITY &
ETHICS IN WASHINGTON

April 30, 2024

The Honorable Benjamin W. Hovland
Chair

Election Assistance Commission
633 3rd Street, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20001

The Honorable Donald L. Palmer
Vice Chair

Election Assistance Commission
633 3rd Street, NE, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Election Assistance Commission Inspector General Vacancy

Dear Chair Hovland and Vice Chair Palmer,

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (“CREW”) respectfully requests that the Election Assistance Commission (“EAC”) move expeditiously to recruit, hire, and onboard an experienced and motivated individual to serve as EAC Inspector General (“IG”). Escalating attacks on election workers, voting rights, and our democratic institutions reinforce the need for EAC to fulfill its mission of “improving the electoral process to ensure that all eligible citizens have the right to vote and have their votes counted accurately.”¹ However, recent internal management challenges and budget constraints from Congress have made EAC’s work even more difficult. Promptly filling EAC’s IG vacancy will enable the agency to have an independent oversight infrastructure in place as we approach the 2024 general election cycle.

The EAC Office of Inspector General (“OIG”) “is an independent division” of the agency which is intended to ensure that the agency functions effectively and efficiently on behalf of the public.² OIG was created in 2005 pursuant to the bipartisan Help America Vote Act (“HAVA”) and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended (“IG Act”).³ OIG’s mission is “to safeguard the Federal investment in our electoral system by conducting objective and meaningful oversight. It accomplishes this mission by conducting audits, investigations, and evaluations of EAC, its programs, its contractors, and its grantees.”⁴

¹ United States Election Assistance Commission, Careers, accessed Apr. 25, 2024, <https://www.eac.gov/about/careers>.

² United States Election Assistance Commission, Inspector General, accessed Apr. 25, 2024, <https://www.eac.gov/inspector-general>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

The next EAC Inspector General will have to tackle long-standing challenges as well as more recent issues that could undermine the agency's work. According to public reports, the EAC, which is responsible for developing standards for voting equipment and provides resources to state and local election officials, "has struggled in recent years to retain high-level staff and to provide effective oversight of federal elections."⁵ Last year, the executive director of the agency was fired by the Commissioners after he obtained a substantial pay increase and used government funds to pay for academic coursework without their approval.⁶ Curiously, this personnel decision was made as a result of an investigation launched by another agency's inspector general.⁷ The ousted executive, Steven Frid, was at the helm of EAC for less than a year and the agency's third executive director within three years.⁸

EAC's new executive director, Brianna Schletz, is now in place, but the agency's budget has also changed dramatically over the last few years.⁹ In 2024, Congress massively decreased EAC's budget allocation for providing HAVA election administration grants to states for technology and security enhancement from \$425 million in fiscal year 2020 (plus an additional \$400 million in COVID response funds), to \$75 million in fiscal years 2022 and 2023, and now \$55 million for fiscal year 2024.¹⁰ It is unclear how these management and budget changes will impact EAC or its OIG, but certainly the lack of stability in leadership and the demands of the upcoming election cycle increase the demand for the internal oversight that a permanent OIG provides.

Conclusion

The need for a permanent Inspector General at the EAC could not be more pressing. While the public servants currently working in the EAC OIG are dedicated

⁵ Jen Fifield, *Fired head of U.S. election agency got unauthorized \$31,000 raise, investigation finds*, Votebeat, Apr. 23, 2024, <https://www.votebeat.org/2024/04/23/us-election-assistance-commission-director-steven-frid-investigation-raise-harvard/>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ United States Election Assistance Commission, *U.S. Election Assistance Commission Announces Appointment Of Brianna Schletz As Executive Director*, Mar. 12, 2024, <https://www.eac.gov/news/2024/03/12/us-election-assistance-commission-announces-appointment-brianna-schletz-executive>.

¹⁰ See, Alexandria Jacobson, *EXCLUSIVE: Congress raids presidential campaign fund in surprise reversal*, Raw Story, Mar. 28, 2024, <https://www.rawstory.com/raw-investigates/presidential-election-campaign-fund-2667628821/>; Carrie Levine, *Critical federal election administration grant funding struggles through Congress*, Votebeat, Mar. 25, 2024, <https://www.votebeat.org/2024/03/25/elections-grants-election-assistance-commission-presidential-campaign-fund/>.

and rigorous in the performance of their duties and the EAC might appoint an Acting IG in the short term, as Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA) has noted, permanent IG's are critical because "[e]ven the best acting Inspector General lacks the standing to make lasting changes needed to improve his or her office."¹¹ Filling this vacancy is critical to ensure the integrity of our elections and that state and local election officials have the federal support they need to do their jobs safely and effectively. We implore you to approach this search with the care and urgency that it demands.

Sincerely,



Noah Bookbinder
President



Donald K. Sherman
Executive Director & Chief Counsel

cc:

The Hon. Bryan Steil
Chairman
House Committee on Administration

The Hon. Amy Klobuchar
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Rules and Administration

The Hon. Gary Peters
Chairman
Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

¹¹ Andrew Ackerman, *Maloney Named Interim SEC Inspector General*, Wall Street Journal, Jan. 27, 2012, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204573704577187443078314650>.