

January 26, 2018

The Hon. Ron Johnson, Chairman
The Hon. Claire McCaskill, Ranking Member
Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Support the Transition Team Ethics Improvement Act (S. 2321)

Dear Members of the Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee:

We are writing to encourage the Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee to address the problem of a potentially chaotic transition of power from one administration to the next due to the lack of transparency and guidance on conflicts of interest for presidential transition teams. Sens. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Thomas Carper (D-Del.) have introduced the “Transition Team Ethics Improvement Act” (S. 2321) that would provide such transparency and accountability to transition teams, and we urge the Committee to proceed with consideration of this important legislation.

Our organizations and academics include: Campaign Legal Center, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), Demand Progress Action, Democracy 21, Ambassador (ret.) Norman L. Eisen, Thomas E. Mann, Norman J. Ornstein, Project on Government Oversight (POGO), Public Citizen, and Prof. James A. Thurber.

The federal government already invests significantly into the well-being of presidential transition teams, providing support with taxpayer funds and ready access to executive agencies as well as non-public documents. It has long been recognized that the very stability of our federal government depends in no small part on the readiness of transition teams to staff agencies, set policy priorities and get the new administration up and running quickly and soundly.

However, the ability of presidential transition teams to do so can be hampered when conflicts of interest run rampant among transition team officers and staff, and when many key actions by the team are made in the dark.

Many transition teams attempt to tackle these problems by establishing their own ethics rules, but the law neither requires transition teams to establish ethics codes nor provides guidance as to “best” ethics procedures.

The Transition Team Ethics Improvement Act would require presidential candidates to develop timely ethics plans for their transition teams, establish minimum standards for these ethics plans, and enhance disclosure requirements for transition team members.

For the stability of our federal government, the Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee should recognize that presidential transition teams need not only funds and

access to meet their challenges, but also guidance for transparency and accountability. This legislation would fill that void.

We strongly urge the Committee to move forward with the Transition Team Ethics Improvement Act.

Sincerely,

Campaign Legal Center
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Demand Progress Action
Democracy 21
Ambassador (ret.) Norman L. Eisen
Thomas E. Mann
Norman J. Ornstein
Project on Government Oversight (POGO)
Public Citizen
Prof. James A. Thurber