

April 14, 2025

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

We the undersigned call to your attention our concern about the apparent closure of the Office of Congressional Conduct (OCC), formerly the Office of Congressional Ethics. House leadership has still not approved the OCC's board, which prevents the office from operating despite the majority of Members voting to reauthorize the office in January.

For the first time in the OCC's history, it cannot take any action to fulfill its mission of reviewing allegations of misconduct. We write to raise alarm that this has effectively closed the office and ended its work protecting the public interest through independent, nonpartisan ethics oversight of the House of Representatives.

We believe that the majority of members of Congress seek to comply with ethics requirements and recognize the necessity of a non-partisan compliance mechanism, as demonstrated by the House establishing and maintaining the OCC for over 15 years. Specifically, a functioning OCC is essential for the House for four reasons.

First, the OCC has established its valuable contribution to nonpartisan ethics enforcement and transparency. From 2009 to 2023, the OCC investigated approximately 242 cases, dismissing cases that lacked evidence of violations while referring other cases to the Committee on Ethics for further review. Of those investigations, 118 concerned Democrats and 124 concerned Republicans.¹ More importantly, substantiated claims of misconduct that resulted in published reports, have increased public confidence that the House takes allegations of misconduct seriously.²

Second, the OCC is one of the only safeguards against corruption in Congress and the only independent ethics enforcement body in either chamber. The OCC's anticorruption work benefits both the voters, who seek transparency about their

¹ The Little Engine that Could, Common Cause (Mar. 2024), https://commoncause.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/OCE_MiniReport-3-21-24.pdf?_gl=1*1mwb6z2*_gcl_au*MjYxNzY4ODI5LjE3NDQxMjcyNzU.

² Roger G. Wieand, The Congressional Ethics Enforcement Gap, Campaign Legal Center (2024), https://campaignlegal.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/The%20Congressional%20Ethics%20Enforcement%20Gap_0.pdf.

elected officials, and members of Congress, who deserve neutral fact-finding to establish that allegations of misconduct are either substantiated or not.

Third, shuttering the office is detrimental to the public's trust in Congress. Greed and corruption are among Americans' top concerns with our political system.³ When elected officials are credibly accused of unethical, corrupt, or illegal acts, the public has the right to know that such allegations will be investigated, and ultimately what the investigation shows.

Finally, the continued effective operation of the OCC is what voters want. Past attempts to weaken the OCC were politically damaging and were met with voter disapproval. When former Speaker John Boehner would not commit to reauthorizing OCC in 2010, he faced constituent backlash and reversed his position.⁴ In 2017 when Congress planned to dismantle the OCC, it faced widespread public outrage that resulted in its reauthorization.⁵ It is likely the failure to approve the board this Congress will have the same impact on Americans.

The OCC's ability to operate is crucial for maintaining independent and nonpartisan ethics oversight that benefits both members of Congress and the public. As such, we call on the House of Representatives to urge leadership to expeditiously approve the OCC board.

Sincerely,

Campaign Legal Center
American Governance Institute
Bryson B. Morgan, Caplin & Drysdale
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Democracy 21
Feminist Majority Foundation
Fix Democracy First
Government Information Watch
GovTrack.us
Hip Hop Caucus Education Fund
Impact Fund

³ American's Dismal Views of the Nation's Politics, Pew Research Center (Sept. 19, 2023), <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/americans-dismal-views-of-the-nations-politics/>.

⁴ *Susan Crabtree*, Ohio Tea Party splits with Boehner on ethics, *The Hill* (Nov. 18, 2010) <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/75606-ohio-tea-party-splits-with-boehner-on-ethics/>.

⁵ *The Data Team*, Congress abandons effort to kill ethics office, *The Economist* (Jan. 3, 2017) <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2017/01/03/congress-abandons-effort-to-kill-ethics-office>.

Issue One

Japanese American Citizens League

League of Women Voters of the United States

Norm Ornstein

Professor James A. Thurber, Emeritus

Project On Government Oversight (POGO)

Public Citizen

Richard Painter