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January 27, 2016

The Honorable Charles Dent  
Chairman  
House Ethics Committee  
1015 Longworth HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Linda Sanchez  
Ranking Member  
House Ethics Committee  
1015 Longworth HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Dent and Ranking Member Sanchez:

The Campaign Legal Center strongly urges you to publicly release the findings and recommendations of the “working group” on conflicts of interest established by the House Ethics Committee in 2012. We also urge you to release the revised guidance the Committee says it adopted pursuant to the “working group’s” recommendations. Public release of these recommendations is an important step to promote public confidence in an institution whose job approval ratings continue to hover in the teens.

On December 20, 2012, the House Ethics Committee publicly stated that the investigative subcommittee looking into alleged violations of House conflict of interest rules by then-Representative Shelley Berkley (D-NV) had recommended the establishment of a task force to review existing rules and to issue “clear, thorough and comprehensive rules pertaining to conflicts of interest that the House community can readily understand and abide by.”<sup>1</sup> The Committee indicated it agreed with the subcommittee’s findings and conclusions.

While such a task force was apparently never formed, the Ethics Committee announced on May 23, 2013 the appointment of a bipartisan “working group” that would “study matters related to the disclosure of and handling of personal financial interests in the House of Representatives.” Named to the “working group” were Representatives Susan Brooks (R-IN) and Ted Deutch (D-FL). In addition to reviewing the Committee’s “financial disclosure guidance regarding modern complex investment vehicles,” the “working group” was assigned to “review the Committee’s guidance on the various requirements of conflicts of interest rules for Members, officers, and employees of the House of Representative and make recommendations for clarification.” Reps. Brooks and Deutsch were given direction to seek input from Members, officers, staff and the public.

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<sup>1</sup> *Statement of the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Committee on Ethics Regarding Representative Shelley Berkley*, December 20, 2012 (<http://ethics.house.gov/press-release/statement-chairman-and-ranking-member-committee-ethics-regarding-representative-4>)

According to the Committee's January 9, 2014 "Report on Activities," the "working group" met formally nine times primarily focusing on financial disclosure guidance regarding modern complex investment vehicles. The Report also stated the "working group" spent 2014 focusing "on a review of the Committee's guidance on the various requirements of conflicts of interest rules for Members."<sup>2</sup>

Then, on January 2, 2015, the Committee's "Summary of Activities, 113<sup>th</sup> Congress" reported that the "working group" met formally 25 times and that the group's efforts "resulted in changes to the Committee's guidance on the financial disclosure of modern complex investment vehicles."<sup>3</sup>

The investigative subcommittee's initial recommendation for a review of the House's conflict of interest rules was commendable. However, the failure to publicly release the working group's work product is troubling and should be rectified. The Committee should also promptly disclose those "ethics experts" from the private sector with whom it reportedly met.

Concerns about conflicts of interest in congressional actions and decision-making are core ethics issues and accordingly are addressed by House rules and standards in recognition of the need for public confidence in the institution. It is important that the public have confidence that Members are not motivated in their official actions by their own financial or personal interests. It is indeed ironic that the Committee has kept hidden recommendations and changes made to conflict of interest guidance that were meant to assure transparency and to bolster public confidence.

We urge the Committee to expeditiously release the findings, recommendations and conclusions of the Brooks-Deutch "working group" as well as any changes to the guidance provided by the Committee on these issues.

Sincerely,



Meredith McGehee  
Policy Director

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<sup>2</sup> <https://ethics.house.gov/sites/ethics.house.gov/files/2013%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://ethics.house.gov/sites/ethics.house.gov/files/Summary%20of%20Activities%20113th%20Congress.pdf>