March 18, 2016

The Honorable Tom Graves
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz,

We, the undersigned organizations, write in support of a request from several members of Congress to appropriate an additional $125,000 for the Sergeant at Arms to conduct Compartmented Information Security (TS/SCI) Clearance investigations. These funds would address the costs of providing clearance to designated staff who serve in the personal offices of Members of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) to more fully assist each representative in the thorough execution of their oversight duties.

This appropriation would help provide a measure of parity for HPSCI members with their Senate counterparts with respect to the conduct of national security oversight. Each member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence has funds available to hire and clear a staffer to assist with their classified oversight duties. Access to the highest levels of classification is viewed by the Senate as necessary for staff to assist member inquiries into the matters under the committee’s jurisdiction. Such staff provide confidential counsel to each member and a second set of hands and eyes that are less constrained by the competing demands on each member’s time. Members who serve on HPSCI would benefit from a similar arrangement.

In addition, the nature of intelligence oversight suggests that providing additional resources to members of HPSCI would not be inapt. While members of other committees benefit from the assistance and spotlight brought by public stakeholders, legislative support agencies, academics, and others, the work of HPSCI is sufficiently cloistered as to comparatively diminish the input of non-congressionals. Providing a higher level of clearance to personal office staffers who serve members of HPSCI would help ameliorate this deficiency and support improved functioning of a vital congressional committee.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further. Please contact Daniel Schuman, policy director, Demand Progress, at daniel@demandprogress.org or 202-577-6100.

Sincerely yours,

Constitutional Alliance
Council on American-Islamic Relations
Defending Dissent/Bill of Rights Defense Committee
EFF
Fight for the Future
Free Press Action Fund
Government Accountability Project
National Security Archive
National Security Counselors
OpenTheGovernment.org
Project on Government Oversight
R Street Institute
RootsAction.org
The Constitution Project
The Niskanen Center
X-Lab