

September 22, 2020

Dear Representatives Quigley, Collins, Higgins, Norton, Steube, Harder, Axne, Rouda, Cooper, Slotkin, Phillips, Maloney, Comer, Yarmuth, and Womack:

Thank you for your leadership on the Congressional Budget Justification Transparency Act of 2019, H.R. 4894, which was passed by the House of Representatives on September 14, 2020. The legislation would provide much needed transparency and accountability around agency spending proposals, known as Congressional Justifications (“CJs”), by collecting these documents in a central, online repository managed by OMB.

CJs provide a unique window into federal activity for constituents and Members alike, as these plain language explanations of agencies’ plans to spend federal funds are both written at a high level of detail and in language a layperson can understand. Currently, executive branch agencies are not consistently complying with OMB’s requirement to publish their CJ on their own website, and the OMB repository is incomplete¹; there is no way to say how many agencies failed to comply with the publication requirement². As a result, it is not uncommon for oversight committees and even agency staff to struggle with finding previous CJ submissions.

The Congressional Budget Justification Transparency Act of 2019 solves those problems by ordering the publication of CJs as open format machine readable and text searchable files on a central website. This change will facilitate oversight, and in turn, improve agency efficiency as well as root out duplicative programming. It also makes it possible to view agency CJs submitted over multiple years, so that one can see how an agency’s proposals and plans have evolved; allows for comparisons across multiple agencies; and ensures that CJs will not disappear from public — and congressional — view.

We applaud the House for passing the legislation and thank you for your hard work on this bill, and the commitment to transparency the overwhelming and bipartisan House approval³ of this legislation represents. We are grateful for the work of the House Oversight and Reform Committee and House Budget Committee. The Senate has already favorably reported companion legislation from the appropriate committee of jurisdiction, and we hope they act speedily to turn this common sense bill into law.

To discuss our support for the Congressional Budget Justification Transparency Act further, please contact Daniel Schuman, policy director, Demand Progress, at 240-237-3930 or Daniel@DemandProgress.org.

¹ “USASpending Publishes (Some) Budget Requests In A Central Location,” Demand Progress Education Fund (August 9, 2019), available at: <https://firstbranchforecast.com/2019/08/09/usaspending-publishes-some-budget-requests-in-a-central-location/>

² “Feds Lag in Publishing Funding Requests,” Demand Progress Education Fund (March 11, 2019), available at https://s3.amazonaws.com/demandprogress/reports/Congressional_Budget_Justification_Report.pdf.

³ “Congressional Budget Justification Transparency Act: Roll Vote No. 183,” 402-1, available at <https://clerk.house.gov/Votes/2020183>.

Sincerely,

Campaign for Accountability

Data Coalition

Demand Progress

FreedomWorks

Government Information Watch

National Taxpayers Union

Open The Government

Protect Democracy

R Street Institute

Senior Executives Association

Society of Professional Journalists

Taxpayers for Common Sense

Union of Concerned Scientists

Kevin Kosar, AEI*

Lorelei Kelly, Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown University*

** Affiliations listed for identification purposes only*

cc: Members of the House of Representatives