

July 20, 2011

The Honorable Jo Bonner, Chairman  
House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct  
1015 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Linda T. Sánchez, Ranking Member  
House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct  
1015 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bonner and Ranking Member Sánchez:

Recent press reports that indicate severe “partisan dysfunction and accusations of professional misconduct” with respect to the investigation of Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA) by the House Ethics Committee are not only troubling for this case, they are seriously damaging to the credibility of the House Ethics Committee enforcement process.

Our organizations believe the Ethics Committee’s continued pattern of dysfunction requires House Speaker Boehner and House Democratic Leader Pelosi to establish a process to determine what happened in the House Ethics Committee and what steps are necessary to further strengthen the House ethics enforcement process. In this context, we believe that the Office of Congressional Ethics has done an outstanding job in carrying out its assigned responsibilities and that OCE’s role in the House ethics enforcement process should be strengthened and expanded.

Our organizations include the Campaign Legal Center, Common Cause, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, Democracy 21, the League of Women Voters, Public Citizen and U.S. PIRG.

In the meantime the Waters ethics investigation must be pursued and completed.

We strongly urge the Ethics Committee to promptly engage an outside counsel to continue and complete the Waters investigation. The Committee should also establish a reasonable timetable for the resolution of this longstanding matter.

The investigation and resolution of the Waters case needs to be dealt with separately from addressing the issues facing the performance of the Ethics Committee and the key to doing this rests with the appointment of an outside counsel to complete the investigation of the Waters case.

A letter from our groups earlier this month raised concerns about the lack of action on the Waters matter and requested the Committee to issue a public statement about the status of the case and its intended steps to pursue the matter. The recent news reports, however, reveal very serious problems in the Committee’s investigatory process.

The way to provide public credibility for the resolution of the Waters case is to bring in an outside counsel that is not tainted by the current controversy. While we recognize that new staff was hired in May, we do not believe there is a sufficient separation between the staff, the Committee and the current controversy to ensure a publicly credible investigation of the Waters case. Outside counsel has been used successfully by the House Ethics Committee in the past to work on high-profile and polarized cases.

We reject calls for the Waters case to be dismissed. Serious questions have been raised in the Waters case about potential violations of House ethics rules. These ethics questions merit a professional investigation and adjudication.

Campaign Legal Center  
Common Cause  
Citizens for Responsibility  
and Ethics in Washington

Democracy 21  
League of Women Voters  
Public Citizen  
U.S. PIRG