

August 7, 2026

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman, House Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

We write in the shared interest of maintaining a strong, capable, and accountable Congress. That capacity depends in part on institutional memory—preserving the records that document how the House has exercised its constitutional responsibilities, including the power of the purse and oversight of the executive branch. With that principle in mind, we are writing regarding the records of the House Appropriations Committee’s Surveys & Investigations (S&I) staff as that function is understood to be wound down in December 2024.¹ Given the scale and significance of these records, we respectfully seek your assurance that they are being preserved and transferred in a manner consistent with House rules and federal law.

The Surveys & Investigations staff was established in 1943, during the 78th Congress, pursuant to a House resolution offered by then-Chairman Clarence Cannon.² It was designed to provide the Appropriations Committee with a dedicated, nonpartisan investigative capacity to supplement agency testimony and inform the committee’s appropriations and oversight work. Over the ensuing decades, S&I investigators—detailed from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Government Accountability Office, as well as other federal entities—wrote thousands of reports at the direction of appropriations subcommittees.³ These investigations constituted a significant portion of the committee’s work and were generated as a result of written tasking letters signed by the chair and ranking members of the full committee and appropriate appropriations subcommittee.

Although the S&I staff operated largely outside of public view by design, its work informed appropriations decision-making and contributed to major oversight efforts across administrations of both parties. The tasking directives, resulting reports, and supporting materials together constitute a distinctive institutional record of how the committee has exercised oversight over time. These materials therefore hold enduring historical and institutional value.

¹ Dull, M. 2026. “*The House Appropriations Committee Surveys & Investigations Staff and the Arc of Congressional Competence*.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 3: e70083. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lsg.70083>. “S&I study titles declined sharply from the 114th through 118th Congress, its staff dwindled, and, in December 2024, the S&I staff was quietly reorganized out of existence by Chairman Tom Cole.”

² H. Res. 69, introduced on January 25, 1943 ([Congressional Record](#) Vol. 89, part 1, p. 328); debate and adoptions February 11, 1943 ([Congressional Record](#) Vol. 89, part 1, p. 884-891).

³ From committee reports and archival documents, over 2,000 S&I study titles have been identified by Dr. Dull.

House rules and federal law establish clear expectations for the preservation of official committee records. House Rule VII governs House committee records, including requirements for the handling and transfer of noncurrent committee records at the end of a Congress. It clearly defines committee and subcommittee documents as records and sets forth their transfer to the Clerk and on to the National Archives, and how they may be accessed by the public.⁴

Federal law similarly addresses the disposition of noncurrent congressional and committee records. 44 U.S.C. § 2118 provides that the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House of Representatives, acting jointly, shall obtain at the close of each Congress all noncurrent records of Congress and of each congressional committee and transfer them to the National Archives and Records Administration for preservation, subject to the orders of the Senate or the House, respectively.⁵

It is our understanding that the S&I staff's records—both paper files and an associated electronic database—have historically been maintained by the committee and housed in Ford House Office Building room 283. During 2025, that office was dismantled and its records apparently removed or relocated. Because relatively few historical S&I materials have been accessioned to the Center for Legislative Archives, we believe this may be the only comprehensive archive of S&I reports.⁶ Given their age, scope, and significance, these materials appear to fall squarely within the category of official House records subject to House Rule VII and federal law. Even in the absence of these requirements, prudence and civic mindedness would suggest that they be retained and that their story be told publicly.

Scattered copies of S&I reports and related work products have been identified in House Appropriations Committee correspondence files held by the Center for Legislative Archives; in executive branch agency records at the National Archives at College Park; and in the personal papers of former Appropriations Committee members, including the John Taber Papers at the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library; the Jamie L. Whitten Collection at Archives and Special Collections, University of Mississippi Libraries; the Ben F. Jensen Papers at University of Iowa Libraries Special Collections & Archives; the Julia Butler

⁴ House Rule VII 1(a) (119th Congress) requires committee chairs at the end of each Congress to transfer any noncurrent records to the Clerk, and this includes subcommittee records. Rule VII 6(a)(1) defines a record—"any official, permanent record of the House"—to include "with respect to a committee, an official, permanent record of the committee (including any record of a legislative, oversight, or other activity of such committee or a sub-committee thereof)". See

<https://rules.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/rules.house.gov/files/documents/houserules119thupdated.pdf>. See generally, House Practice Manual (118th Congress), Chapter 11 (Committee Records), §16 (Records, Files, and Transcripts), available at

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-HPRACTICE-118/pdf/GPO-HPRACTICE-118.pdf#page=285>. "In the absence of specific disposition by the House, clause 1 of rule VII requires the chair of each committee to deliver to the Clerk all noncurrent records of the committee. *Manual* § 695. Clause 3 of rule VII outlines the procedures for the public release of noncurrent records."

⁵ <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-2023-title44-section2118&num=0&edition=2023>. See generally "Archival Records of Congress: Frequently Asked Questions," Congressional Research Service, R 47590 (Dec. 22, 2025), available at <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47590>.

⁶ S&I reports for 1969 and 1972 as well as documents describing S&I staffing and oversight activities collected from the Center for Legislative Archives and from the personal papers of former committee members.

Hansen Papers at University of Washington Libraries Special Collections; and the Silvio O. Conte Papers at the Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Research Center, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

These materials are not systematically catalogued. They constitute fragments of a much larger body of records. We have compiled more than 2,000 S&I study titles, including extensive investigations of defense, intelligence, weapons systems, military procurement, and installations, as well as programs across nearly every other appropriations jurisdiction. The breadth of this record underscores the importance of preserving the committee's more comprehensive physical and electronic files.

Concerns have been expressed from some quarters about the official disposition of these materials subsequent to the office's closure. We raise this only to respectfully seek your assurance that the records of the Surveys & Investigations staff—both physical and electronic—are being preserved intact and managed in accordance with House rules and applicable law. Specifically, that they will be transferred to the Clerk's office for transmission to the Center for Legislative Archives for storage and eventual public access.

Preserving these records is not merely a question of compliance, but of stewardship. They document a rare and long-standing oversight function of the House Appropriations Committee and will remain an important resource for future Congresses and for the House as an institution. They provide important insight into how congressional oversight has functioned over time and how specific investigations have shaped national policy and governance.

We would welcome the opportunity to hear from you at your earliest convenience. Please contact Dr. Matthew Dull at mdull@vt.edu and Daniel Schuman at daniel@americallabs.org.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your continued leadership in safeguarding the institutional interests of the House of Representatives.

Respectfully,

American Governance Institute
Brechtner Freedom of Information Project
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Data Foundation
Dr. Aaron J. Stockham
Fix Our House
Free Government Information (FGI)
Government Accountability Project
Government Information Watch
GovTrack.us
Lorelei Kelly, Principal, Public Good Group

Mark Weiss
Matthew Dull
MuckRock Foundation
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