

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

October 7, 2009

The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Napolitano:

We write to express concern about the activities of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (“ACORN”) and the organization’s receipt of federal funds. Recently, the U. S. Department of Homeland Security’s (“DHS”) Federal Emergency Management Agency awarded \$997,402 of taxpayer dollars to the ACORN Institute through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) for the FY 2008 Fire Prevention and Safety Program.¹

We are perplexed as to how the ACORN Institute could be considered for a Fire Prevention and Safety grant. These grants are intended to support projects that enhance the safety of the public and firefighters from fire and related hazards. The grants are generally provided directly to first responders, such as local fire departments and emergency medical services, as well as educational and research institutions.

Moreover, this is not the first time the DHS has given money to ACORN. In the 2007 fiscal year, ACORN was awarded \$450,484 out of Louisiana's \$859,596 share of the fire prevention and safety grant. The grant was provided to ACORN Institute, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt corporation, which is a research and training facility used “to combat the poverty, discrimination and community deterioration that keeps low-income people from taking advantage of their rights and opportunities.”²

As you are probably aware, on September 14, 2009 the Senate voted to cut off Department of Housing and Urban Development funding for ACORN; additional votes to cut off other funding followed. The House voted to defund ACORN on September 17, 2009. The Internal Revenue Service has removed ACORN from the agency's volunteer tax assistance program and the Census Bureau has barred the group from assisting with the 2010 census. Several states and localities have issued indictments related to activities by ACORN employees and volunteers during last fall’s election.³ In addition, the House

¹ Audrey Hudson, *Firefighters lose large U.S. grant to ACORN*, WASHINGTON TIMES, Oct. 7, 2009, available at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/oct/07/firefighters-lose-large-grant-to-acorn/> (last visited Oct. 7, 2009).

² ACORN Institute 2007 990, at 8, available at: <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments//2007/721/488/2007-721488419-04ae23bd-9.pdf>.

³ Steve Friess, *Acorn Charged in Voter Registration Fraud Case in Nevada*, N.Y. TIMES, May 5, 2009.

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform issued a minority staff report alleging that ACORN may have engaged in serious wrongdoing.

It is disturbing that ACORN was awarded a grant when fire departments all over the country are struggling to make ends meet and get the equipment and training they need to protect their local communities. A grant of nearly \$1 million in Homeland Security funding was awarded to ACORN, money that might have been awarded to fire departments.

So Congress can better understand the relationship of ACORN and ACORN-affiliated entities with DHS, please provide the following information and documents:

1. Identify all grants provided by DHS to ACORN Institute or any other ACORN-affiliated organization from January 2004 to the present, including the name of the grantee, the purpose of the grant, the amount, the date the funds were awarded, and name of the DHS employee responsible for administering and overseeing the grant.
2. For any grant an ACORN-affiliated entity received from January 2004 to the present, please provide a brief explanation about the criteria considered by DHS for making the grant reward.
3. For any grant an ACORN-affiliated entity received pursuant to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, please produce all documents relating to the award of the grant.
4. For any grant an ACORN-affiliated entity received pursuant to the ARRA, please provide DHS's oversight plan to ensure that grant funds are spent in a manner consistent with the legislation.
5. Please indicate whether there was an audit to determine how ACORN spent the FY 2007 funds of \$450,484 and whether this audit was used to justify the most recent award of \$997,402. If no audit was conducted in 2007, please explain why not.
6. Before any further funding is given to ACORN, please explain how your Department plans to account for these funds and ensure that they are used in compliance with the terms of the grant or contract.
7. Please explain why ACORN, which has no apparent homeland security mission, has received funds from your Department. Additionally, please explain why ACORN has received grant money that is more appropriately given to "a first responder organization." What criteria did DHS use to determine that ACORN qualified for the grant money?

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For purposes of your investigation, ACORN and its affiliates includes, but are not limited to: ACORN, Project Vote/Voting for America, Inc., CCI, Citizens Services Inc. ("CSI"), ACORN Housing Corporation ("AHC"), ACORN Community Labor Organizing Center ("ACLOC"), American Institute for Social Justice ("AISJ"), SEIU Local 100, SEIU Local 880, ACORN Institute, ACORN Votes, Communities Voting Together ("CVT"), and the Working Families Party ("WFP").

Thank you for your attention to these matters. Please provide updates to Daniel Epstein of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform staff at (202) 225-5074 or Ivy Johnson on the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs at (202) 224-2627 on the status of your investigation.

Sincerely,



Sen. Susan Collins
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Homeland Security and Government
Affairs



Rep. Darrell Issa
Ranking Member, Committee on
Oversight and Government Reform

cc: Chairman Joseph Lieberman

cc: Chairman Edolphus Towns