

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

October 7, 2009

The Honorable Richard L. Skinner
Inspector General
Office of Inspector General
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Inspector General Skinner:

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 FY 2008 Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) Program.¹ ACORN has previously received Fire Prevention and Safety Grant money from DHS. In fiscal year 2007, ACORN was awarded \$450,484 out of Louisiana's \$859,596 share of the 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.”

As you are probably aware, on September 14, 2009 the Senate voted to cut off Department of Housing and Urban Development funding for the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (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.

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.

We ask that you investigate why ACORN, which has no apparent homeland security mission, received funds from your Department. More generally, we request that you investigate any DHS grants, contracts, entitlements and other forms of assistance to ACORN and its affiliates. Specifically, we request that you investigate whether DHS has appropriate oversight

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).

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mechanisms in place for all grants, contracts, entitlements and assistance provided to ACORN, ACORN Institute or any other ACORN-affiliated organization. Additionally, we request that you determine whether ACORN and its affiliates used any DHS funds it has received in accordance with the terms of the grant, contract, entitlement or other form of assistance.

We ask that you determine whether DHS conducted an audit of how ACORN spent the FY 2007 funds and whether this audit was used to justify the most recent award. If no audit was conducted in 2007, please conduct an audit of the FY2007 DHS grant of \$450,484 awarded to ACORN in addition to your investigation of the recent grant award of \$997,402. Further, for each grant, contract, entitlement, or other assistance an ACORN-affiliated entity received pursuant to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, we ask that you investigate DHS's oversight plan to ensure that funds were spent in a manner consistent with the legislation.

If your investigation concludes there is evidence that ACORN and its affiliates misused funds, we ask that you refer such evidence to the Commission's Suspension and Debarment Official for a determination of whether ACORN and its affiliates need to be placed on the federal government's Excluded Parties List.

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, and Communities Voting Together ("CVT").

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) 224-4751 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

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cc: Chairman Joseph Lieberman

cc: Chairman Edolphus Towns