

September 26, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and  
Natural Resources  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and  
Natural Resources  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Risk of Impoundment of Appropriated Funds to Energy Efficiency Programs

Dear Chairman Cochran, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairwoman Murkowski, and Ranking Member Cantwell:

Thank you for your past and continued support for federal energy efficiency and clean energy programs.

We, the undersigned, on behalf of a coalition of energy efficiency and clean energy organizations, states, trade associations, businesses and others, write today to urge you to prevent impoundment of appropriated funds and ensure the administration executes its authorities consistent with Congressional intent. This may be done by way of appropriations by including in bills or reports direction to agencies to carry out funded programs; specifying that funding for technical assistance, research, development, demonstration, and commercialization programs is to be used for those purposes; and requiring transparency of spending at a subprogram level. It may also be done by committees of jurisdiction through the normal conduct of agency oversight.

As you know, the administration's budget request proposes severe cuts across the board for energy efficiency programs, especially those administered by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).<sup>1</sup> We are adamantly opposed to those cuts. Now that the federal government is operating under the terms of a continuing resolution through December 8, 2017, we are concerned that critical energy efficiency and clean energy programs could go unfunded or unsupported while longer-term funding levels are negotiated. The suspension or cancellation of programs based on the administration's discretion—or the appearance of discretion—could contravene legislative direction, and potentially amount to impoundment, which, as you know, is “an action or inaction by the President or a federal agency that delays or withholds the obligation or expenditure of budget authority provided in law.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Other agencies, including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and General Services Administration (GSA), also carry out important energy efficiency programs and activities.

<sup>2</sup> According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), “[t]here are two types of impoundment actions: deferrals and rescission proposals. In a deferral, an agency temporarily withholds or delays funds from obligation or expenditure.... A rescission involves the cancellation of budget authority previously

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Enforcement of the prohibition on impoundment is highly sensitive and might not result in a timely expenditure or other release of funds. Furthermore, some programs involve multi-year contracts and timelines and any suspension of funds could harm research efforts already underway. Therefore, we urge you take the precautions necessary to prevent any such scenario from occurring.

To this end, we offer this set of recommendations, and stand ready to provide additional support for your efforts to ensure that Congress's directives are followed and programs continue uninterrupted. First, while the continuing resolution is in force, we suggest robust and continuous oversight of DOE, EPA, and other agencies carrying out energy efficiency and clean energy programs. The U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is expected to issue guidance for agency spending through December 8. Congress has an obligation to hold agencies accountable, and the administration has a responsibility to answer questions about its performance. When letters and written inquiries are not enough, we urge you to call on senior leaders to testify on the record about the status of programs and their plans to ensure their agencies are acting consistently with Congressional intent.

Second, we recommend including clear direction to the administration in legislation or accompanying reports, as appropriate, to carry out programs, activities, and projects and expend funds as appropriated to at least the subprogram level past December 8. In some cases, where a program lacks specific authorization (i.e., EPA's WaterSense) or is funded as part of a portfolio of initiatives (i.e., EPA's ENERGY STAR®), it could be necessary to provide more detailed instructions than in past years to ensure these programs, activities, and projects continue.

Third, we recommend providing clear direction to the administration with respect to specific programmatic activities in legislation or accompanying reports, as appropriate, for the remainder of FY2018. Some successful programs provide commercialization assistance for energy efficiency and clean energy technologies or funding for field demonstrations, which the administration has indicated will be deprioritized. As evidenced by the language included in the Senate Energy and Water Development appropriations bill and report for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018, when Congress expects an agency (e.g., U.S. DOE) to carry out activities beyond basic research and demonstration, we recommend providing the administration with additional instructions that reflect Congress's intent.

And fourth, due to the inherent difficulties with identifying potential impoundment situations in a timely way, we suggest Congress include provisions to improve transparency with respect to how the administration is spending funds in FY2018 and beyond. For example, Congress could require agencies to provide it with budget allotments at the subprogram level. This would facilitate tracking and potentially address congressional queries concerning spending and progress. A complementary approach would be to require agencies to provide notification to Congress of certain reallocations or reallocations of funds.

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provided by Congress (before that authority would otherwise expire), and can be accomplished only through legislation." In a footnote, GAO advises that "[d]eferrals for policy reasons are not authorized." (2 U.S.C. § 684(b)). *Principles of Federal Appropriations Law: Fourth Edition, Chapter 2*, GAO-16-464SP, March 10, 2016, pgs. 2-47 and 2-48.

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We are prepared to work with you and your colleagues on the Appropriations and Energy and Natural Resources Committees to provide more assistance as requested to identify specific programs, activities, and projects that require extra attention. We are also willing to be a resource for committees and senators that do not primarily or ordinarily deal with appropriations for or oversight of energy efficiency and clean energy programs. And, as your attention shifts to longer-term funding in FY2018 and the budget and appropriations for FY2019, we will do our best to support your efforts to advance U.S. energy efficiency and clean energy programs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Alliance for Industrial Efficiency

Alliance to Save Energy

Ameresco

American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy

ASHRAE

Business Council for Sustainable Energy

Copper Development Association

Cree

E4TheFuture

Efficiency First

Environmental and Energy Study Institute

Federal Performance Contracting Coalition

Fuel Cell and Hydrogen Energy Association

Green Business Council Inc.

Home Performance Coalition

Institute for Market Transformation

Integrated CHP Systems

International Association of Lighting Designers

Midwest Cogeneration Association

Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance

National Association for State Community Services Programs

National Association of Energy Service Companies

National Association of State Energy Officials

Natural Resources Defense Council

Power Equipment Associates

U.S. Green Building Council

CC:           Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
              Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
              The Honorable Mitch McConnell, U.S. Senate Majority Leader  
              The Honorable Charles E. Schumer, U.S. Senate Democratic Leader