Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 29, 2016

The Honorable Jacob J. Lew
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Mr. Secretary:

If implemented properly, the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (DATA Act) will produce consistent and reliable federal spending data which will enhance the ability of taxpayers, Congress, and federal agency officials to track and analyze how the federal government uses taxpayer dollars.[1] Federal agencies are required to start reporting data in accordance with guidance issued by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Department of Treasury (Treasury) by May 2017.

OMB and Treasury have made progress in implementation of the law, including finalizing 57 data elements which will provide a basis to improve the quality and consistency of federal spending data.[2] Today, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report finding that while the majority of the 57 DATA Act data elements defined by OMB largely followed leading practices, GAO found some imprecise and ambiguous definitions and that "without more interpretative clarification, agencies run the risk of reporting data that cannot be aggregated government-wide."[3]

GAO also found that despite progress in establishing data standards and draft guidance, OMB and Treasury have not yet finalized DATA Act guidance documents for agency use.[4] According to GAO, the lack of final technical guidance from OMB and Treasury could impede agencies' ability to meet reporting timelines.[5] Treasury issued a draft version of the guidance on December 31, 2015, but Treasury noted this draft version "does not include agency submission specifications regarding the file format, content scope, file organization, etc."[6] GAO also

[1] Pub. L. No. 113-101, 128 Stat. 1146 (May 9, 2014), codified at 31 U.S.C. § 6101 note.
[2] The White House, *Standardizing and Simplifying the Government's Data on Federal* Spending (August 2015) available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/08/31/standardizing-and-simplifying-government%E2%80%99s-data-federal-spending.
[3] U.S. Gov't Accountability Office, *DATA Act: Data Standards Established, but More Complete and Timely Guidance is Needed to Ensure Effective Implementation* (Jan. 2016) (GAO-16-261).
[4] *Id.*
[5] *Id.*
[6] DATA Act and FFATA Collaboration Space, *Current Draft Version (v0.7), available at:* https://fedspendingtransparency.github.io/data-exchange-standard/

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reported that "agencies could incur additional costs as they revise implementation plans to align with later versions of the guidance or could be forced to delay implementation."[7]

Without the timely issuance of final guidance, federal agencies may not have the information needed to effectively implement the DATA Act standards by the statutory deadline, or may incur higher costs because of the delay in receiving final guidance. We request OMB and Treasury promptly report to Congress their status in implementing the GAO recommendations regarding the DATA Act. Specifically, please include information relating to clarifying data element definitions and finalizing the technical guidance, and work diligently to ensure effective implementation.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Maggie Childs of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Majority staff at (202) 225-5074, Krista Boyd of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Minority staff at (202) 225-5051, and Caitlin Runyan of Senator Warner's staff at (202) 224-2023. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Jason Chaffetz
Chairman
House Committee on Oversight
and Government Reform

Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member
House Committee on Oversight
and Governmental Reform

Mark Meadows
Chairman
Subcommittee on Government Operations

Gerald E. Connolly
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Government Operations

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

[7] GAO-16-261.