

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION**

June 22, 2023

FCC Inspector General Nomination

DEMOCRATIC QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

Fara Damelin

Questions for the Record from Chair Cantwell
To FCC IG Nominee Fara Damelin

Question 1. The FCC Inspector General is responsible for ensuring accountability in the funding programs that the FCC is tasked with administering.

One example is the FCC's Emergency Connectivity Fund or "ECF" program which was created during the pandemic to provide schools and libraries with the tools their communities needed for remote learning.

When establishing programs such as this one, the FCC creates rules for eligibility and participation that can often be complex in nature, for the purpose of ensuring that federal dollars are used effectively.

1a. How will you ensure accountability in the management of the FCC's funding programs?

The programs administered by the FCC are similar in nature to other complex federal programs I have helped to protect over the years, containing detailed program rules around eligibility and participation to ensure that federal funds are expended as directed and intended to support specific communities and goals.

If confirmed, I will take the same approach as I have in my prior OIG oversight positions to ensure accountability in the management of the FCC's funding programs, focusing first on maximizing transparency around open recommendations and devoting resources to helping the FCC close those that are most impactful towards protecting complex public benefit programs.

This involves identifying all pending open recommendations from prior OIG reports, engaging with the FCC to learn the status of these recommendations, and working with the Commission to resolve them. As part of this process, the FCC OIG would identify "priority open recommendations," that if resolved, would have the greatest impact on helping the FCC address its most significant accountability challenges, to include in the administration of these complex, large dollar value programs. This would allow the FCC to direct its resources first to those priority areas likely to have the largest impact in protecting its highest risk programs. To maximize transparency over this process, I would explore strategies to publicly post all related reports and associated open recommendations on www.oversight.gov.

1b. How will you navigate the audit and investigation process given the complex nature of the rules for each of the FCC's several funding programs?

OIGs are guided by core oversight principles and authorities set forth in the Inspector General Act, by legislation directing OIGs to issue mandatory reports, and by standards promulgated by the IG community through the Council of Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) and by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). To meet these requirements, OIGs employ auditors, investigators, evaluators, attorneys, data analysts, and administrative professionals who

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FCC IG Nominee Fara Damelin's Responses to Questions for the Record

have expertise, training, and the tools to objectively and thoroughly analyze and evaluate complex federal programs across the government to provide impactful oversight.

If confirmed, as I have done in other OIGs where I've served, I will independently lead comprehensive and impartial audits, investigations and other reviews that are informed by subject matter experts, using criteria provided by the relevant statutes, regulations, policies, program notices, guidelines, and forms. For highly technical matters, I will ensure that we draw expertise from subject matter experts within the FCC OIG, the FCC, the Universal Service Administrative Company, Congress, the GAO, law enforcement partners, and federal, state, tribal, and industry stakeholders. Based on my experience as Whistleblower Protection Coordinator for AmeriCorps OIG, whistleblowers are another crucial source of information, and I will seek to promote whistleblower protections and expand outreach and education to potential whistleblowers. In addition, I will ensure that the FCC OIG has the policies, processes, training, and resources, as well as the skills and experience necessary to provide comprehensive, thorough, and timely audits, evaluations, investigations, and other reviews. Further, I will continue to benchmark with other OIGs as well as the GAO and the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC) to identify leading practices and find opportunities to collaborate on joint oversight initiatives.

1c. What do you anticipate will be the biggest challenge in overseeing large amounts of federal funding at the FCC, and how will you handle this important task?

Based on my experience within the IG community, the biggest challenge will be to prioritize oversight opportunities and projects based upon the highest risk, and to ensure that our limited resources are expended towards helping the FCC maximize efficiency in its programs and operations, and protect FCC programs from fraud, waste, and abuse.

Working with the FCC OIG and key stakeholders, I will consider risk factors to inform oversight priorities, including but not limited to, the scope of potential financial loss, timeliness and urgency, and the impact on vulnerable populations. I will ensure that we develop a comprehensive communication and outreach plan, sharing an immediate vision of transparency and accessibility with all FCC OIG staff, the FCC Commissioners and staff, Congressional members and staff, and external stakeholders.