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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

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January 20, 2026

Director Russell Vought
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Vought:

As members of the Senate Committee on the Budget, which has jurisdiction over the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), we are writing regarding your agency's spend plans for its substantial appropriation in P.L. 119-21, the Republican reconciliation bill.

Specifically, Sec. 90103 appropriated \$100 million to OMB available through the end of fiscal year (FY) 2029 "for purposes of finding budget and accounting efficiencies in the executive branch."¹ As of the time of this letter, OMB's current annual budget—first established by Congress in the FY 2024 appropriations cycle and carried forward by subsequent continuing resolutions—is \$129 million.² As such, this one-time \$100 million increase in funding for OMB is relatively massive, even as the statutory language governing it is incredibly broad. This appropriation is also unprecedented when viewed against OMB's historical funding levels. After adjusting for inflation, OMB's annual budget authority has generally ranged between approximately \$120 million and \$145 million (in 2025 dollars) for more than four decades.³ At no point in that period has Congress provided OMB with an additional, one-time appropriation approaching this magnitude on top of its base budget.

At the same time, the statutory language governing this appropriation is alarmingly broad. The phrase "finding budget and accounting efficiencies in the executive branch" is undefined in statute, is not accompanied by reporting requirements, and places few limits on permissible uses. Without clear guardrails, transparency, and congressional visibility, this funding risks functioning as an OMB discretionary reserve pool or "slush fund" rather than a targeted, accountable investment tied to measurable efficiencies.

These concerns are heightened by the fact that OMB has already apportioned the entirety of the \$100 million appropriation, with no explanatory footnotes, despite the funds being available through FY 2029 and despite the absence of any public explanation of how such a rapid, full apportionment aligns with the statute's purpose.⁴ The decision to immediately apportion the full amount—rather than phasing apportionments based on defined projects, timelines, or

¹ Pub. L. No. 119-21, 139 Stat. 72 (2025), <https://www.congress.gov/119/plaws/publ21/PLAW-119publ21.pdf#page=293>.

² Pub. L. No. 118-47, 138 Stat. 460 (2024), <https://www.congress.gov/118/plaws/publ47/PLAW-118publ47.pdf#page=75>.

³ *Off. of Mgmt. & Budget*, Public Budget Database, Wayback Mach. (Jan. 20, 2025),

<https://web.archive.org/web/20250120041729/https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/supplemental-materials/>

demonstrated needs—raises serious questions about whether this funding is being treated as a de facto slush fund available at the discretion of the Director, rather than as a narrowly constrained appropriation subject to meaningful oversight.

Given OMB’s central role in shaping executive branch budget execution, apportionments, and agency operations, it is imperative that Congress understand precisely how these funds will be used, what controls will govern them, and how OMB will ensure that expenditures remain consistent with congressional intent and the law. Simply put, an administration that has touted itself as the “most transparent in history”⁵ must provide evidence that these funds are not simply a slush fund to be employed in accordance only with the Director’s whims; indeed, congressional oversight of such an open-ended appropriation is a core function of the Congress, and, in this case, of the Budget Committee.

To that end, we request that you provide answers to the following questions by February 3, 2026.

1. How does OMB plan on spending the funding appropriated by Sec. 90103? Please provide a detailed table of the categories of programs, activities, and contracts that OMB plans to fund and the amounts for each.
2. Has OMB spent any of the funding in accordance with this appropriation? If yes, please provide a detailed table of the funding, including the dates, amounts, and purposes of the expenditures.
3. How does OMB interpret the statutory phrase “finding budget and accounting efficiencies in the executive branch”? What criteria will OMB use to determine if spending falls within this purpose?
4. How can Congress be assured that all obligations and expenditures are narrowly related to “finding budget and accounting efficiencies in the executive branch”?
5. Will the funding be used to increase OMB’s staffing levels, including detailees and contractors? If yes, please specify the positions and their functions.
6. How do you justify increasing OMB’s budget while simultaneously slashing funding for other agencies, including the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Education, and the Department of Veterans Affairs?

⁴Off. of Mgmt. & Budget, *Apportionment of Funds for TAFS 011-0300 2025/2029 – Office of Management and Budget* (Iteration 1, approved Sept. 16, 2025), OpenOMB, <https://openomb.org/file/11468417> (last visited Jan. 6, 2026).

⁵ The Most Transparent Administration in History!, White House (Mar. 3, 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/videos/the-most-transparent-administration-in-history/>

Sincerely,

Jeffrey A. Merkley

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Budget

Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Tim Kaine

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

Ben Ray Luján

Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator

Ron Wyden

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Patty Murray

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Mark R. Warner

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

Alex Padilla

Alex Padilla
United States Senator