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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

July 21, 2021

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Michael E. Horowitz
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Inspector General Horowitz:

I am writing to request that you open an investigation into the creation and implementation of the JustGrants grants management system that recently replaced the Grants Management System, NexGen, and the Grants Payment Request System. In conjunction with the Automated Standard Application for Payments (ASAP), JustGrants is intended to be a consolidated grants management system utilized by all three grant-making components at the Department of Justice (DOJ).

The Office of Justice Programs (OJP) offers financial assistance to scholars, practitioners, various experts, and state and local governments and agencies for a variety of programs. The Office on Violence Against Women administers 19 grant programs to help provide victims with protection and services needed to live safe and healthy lives. The Community Oriented Policing Services Office (COPS) offers grants to help law enforcement agencies to hire more officers, and for other purposes.

On October 15, 2020, all three of the aforementioned grant-making components of DOJ launched JustGrants, which is intended to help awardees manage award activities. As expected there have been issues with the transition into the new system. On May 6, 2021, your office issued an Issue Alert that noted in part “As of April 2021, 6 months after the launch of JustGrants, OJP acknowledges that certain award recipients continue to experience issues registering for JustGrants, assigning roles, and accepting awards, which prevents award recipients from accessing DOJ funds.”¹

The Issue Alert also notes that “...the OIG (Office of the Inspector General) has experienced delays and difficulties obtaining accounts for JustGrants, hampering our access to data and information that limits our oversight efforts.”² This is not the only instance of your office noting difficulty in accessing the new system. A report issued by your office in May of 2021, “Audit of the Office on Violence Against Women

¹ [U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, Issue Alert: JustGrants Transition Impacting DOJ Awardees' Ability to Access Funds and Manage Award Activities, May 6, 2021](#)

² Ibid

Technical Assistance Awards to the National Center for State Courts, Williamsburg, Virginia,” notes that “During our audit, we obtained and relied on information from the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) Grants Management System (GMS),...”³ The report notes a few sentences later “Around October 2020, OJP transitioned to a new system, JustGrants, to replace GMS [Grants Management System]. As a result, NCSC [National Center for State Courts] and OIG access to GMS was limited.”⁴ This appears to indicate that in conducting an audit of an award to a non-profit, both the non-profit and the OIG, which was conducting the audit, had increased difficulty obtaining information about the award because of the transition to JustGrants.

Difficulty in accessing award information and the awards themselves has been noted elsewhere by the OIG. In June, your office produced “Audit of the Office of Justice Programs Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Cooperative Agreement Awarded to the Montana Division of Criminal Investigation, Helena, Montana.” The report notes that, “In addition to the pandemic, MTDCI [Montana Division of Criminal Investigation] officials stated that the OJP’s conversion from the Grant Management System (GMS) to Justice Grants System (JustGrants), had an impact on the MTDCI’s ability to conduct ICAC [Internet Crimes Against Children] investigations. According to MTDCI officials, from October 1, 2020 to February 16, 2021, the MTDCI was not able to reimburse affiliate agencies and as a result the affiliates could no longer work on cases.”⁵ In addition to the transition to JustGrants hampering the ability of awardees to access grants and the OIG to conduct audits of those grants, this report suggests that at least temporarily, investigations related to internet crimes against children were not able to proceed. October 2020, through mid-February of 2021, is a large window in which these cases were not being worked and during which many children could have fallen prey to victimization.

According to an update posted to the JustGrants webpage in May of 2021, “5,897 entities (organizations) out of 6,031 have registered in the system (98%),” though there is an acknowledgment that “With a transition as significant as this one, there will always be challenges.”⁶ Despite assurances that issues relating to the transition to JustGrants were being resolved, recently a story was published by Reuters detailing issues grant recipients have had with JustGrants.⁷ The Reuters piece, as with the OIG reports cited in this letter, describes the clear adverse consequences of failures in the JustGrants system. According to this article, a Washington, DC-area nonprofit was forced to curtail services to victims of sexual abuse and violence because they were unable to access their grant. Apparently another grant recipient was forced to delay a project that is intended to help police investigate cyberstalking.

For the reasons detailed in this letter, I am asking your office to investigate the transition to JustGrants. Circumstances around the program raise many troubling questions.

1. Did the awarding of the \$115 million contract, as reported by Reuters, to General Dynamics follow all applicable rules, regulations, and guidelines?

³ [U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, Audit of the Office on Violence Against Women Technical Assistance Awards to the National Center for State Courts, Williamsburg, Virginia, May 2021](#)

⁴ Ibid

⁵ [U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, Audit of the Office of Justice Programs Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Cooperative Agreement Awarded to the Montana Division of Criminal Investigation, Helena, Montana, June 2021](#)

⁶ <https://justicegrants.usdoj.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh296/files/media/document/news-recipient-applicant-052621.pdf>

⁷ [Sarah N. Lynch, U.S. \\$4.7 billion grant program’s tech woes take toll on justice groups, Reuters, July 12, 2021](#)

2. Has the DOJ appropriately monitored General Dynamics' performance of the contract?
3. Have there been any similar issues involving the same contractor or contractor employees at any other agencies doing information technology related work?
4. Has the status of JustGrants improved since your office published the Issue Alert on May 6, 2021?
5. How long was the OIG denied access to JustGrants once it went live in October of 2020? Why was OIG unable to access grant information?
6. Since JustGrants went live in October of 2020, how many grant recipients were unable to access awards and what is the total value of awards that have been or are currently delayed?
7. What is the full scope of programs that have been impacted or currently are being impacted by the inability of award recipients to access their awards?
8. The Reuters piece quotes the DOJ as stating "The development strategy for JustGrants was not to have an end-to-end system fully functional in October 2020."⁸ Given that JustGrants was apparently unable to provide all award recipients with access to their awards, was the strategy for taking the system online appropriate?
9. Is JustGrants currently functioning as intended, and if not, what is the timeline for addressing user issues with the system?
10. How can the Department of Justice, and the federal government overall, avoid issues similar to those experienced with the JustGrants transition when undertaking other information technology development?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please contact Nick Wyatt of my staff at the U.S. Senate Committee of the judiciary with any questions at 202-224-5225.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member

⁸ Ibid