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Hon. Theodore E. Deutch  
Chairman  
House Committee on Ethics  
1015 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Michael Guest  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Ethics  
1015 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Deutch and Ranking Member Guest:

The past several days have revealed a deeply troubling pattern of apparent ethical lapses by a Member of Congress that, if found to be true, include a *quid pro quo* agreement, the submission of false or incomplete information to the Ethics Committee in connection with a gift waiver request, repeated omissions of information about valuable gifts from Financial Disclosure Statements, and the making of false or misleading statements with respect to legislator records. These potential acts threaten to undermine the credibility of the House Ethics Committee in overseeing enforcement of the ethics rules and have cast an ethical shadow over the City of Los Angeles. I ask for your immediate attention to ensure that these significant allegations do not escape investigation and that the full facts find the light of day before the Member departs Congress.

In 2011, the House Ethics Committee granted Congresswoman Karen Bass a waiver to receive a free Master's degree from the University of Southern California Suzanne Dworack-Peck School of Social Work. The full value of the scholarship was \$95,000. Recently, federal prosecutors have unearthed records that show that the University official who awarded the scholarship to Congresswoman Bass – an official who is *already* under federal criminal indictment for related actions – did so with the expectation that the Congresswoman would take official action to benefit the School of Social Work; namely, that Congresswoman Bass would support federal legislation to provide additional funding to the Social Work program (“by awarding free tuition to Bass in 2011, [Dean] Flynn hoped to obtain the congresswoman’s assistance in passing coveted legislation, prosecutors wrote in a July court filing.”) It appears that the Congresswoman may have done exactly that: according to the Los Angeles Times, “Bass later sponsored a bill in Congress that would have expanded USC’s and other private universities’ access to federal funding for social work — ‘just as defendant Flynn wanted,’ the filing states.” The Los Angeles Times further reports that “prosecutors have now declared that Bass’ scholarship and her dealings with USC are ‘critical’ to their bribery case and to their broader portrayal of corruption in the university.”

Several other Members of Congress have been sanctioned for improperly accepting gifts in exchange for official action:

- James Traficant went to prison and was expelled from Congress, in part for taking gifts from business interests in exchange for using influence with federal officials to help them out.
- An investigation into Matt Gaetz centers in part on whether he took gifts (in the form of escorts) in exchange for pushing the interests of the medical marijuana industry.
- Charlie Rangel was charged by the Ethics Committee for, among other things, soliciting gifts in exchange for favors (the House Ethics Committee split 4-4 on that particular charge).
- The House Ethics Committee found that speaker Jim Wright violated House ethics rules when he accepted a car, housing, and salary for his wife from a constituent who had legislative interests that came before Wright.
- Senator Bob Menendez was admonished by the Senate Ethics Committee for accepting private plane flights from a friend and donor whom he used his position to benefit. He was ordered to repay Melgen for these flights.

With all of the information about the scholarship and Bass' actions on behalf of USC now known, I am asking the House Ethics Committee to consider opening an investigation into this troubling situation involving nearly one-hundred thousand dollars in personal educational benefits that may have been given in exchange for legislative action.

Our elected leaders are obligated to act with transparency, integrity and honesty – our very system of democracy requires it.

There are many open questions as to this gift. It is unclear whether the House Ethics Committee knew that the scholarship gift was provided by an entity that retains a federal lobbyist and was gifted based on the Congresswoman's official position, which would have prevented this gift from qualifying for a waiver under House Rule 25, clause 5. Previous attempts at requesting correspondence related to this gift have been rejected, with Congresswoman Bass' staff claiming that they do not have access to Congressional records and referring such requests to the "Congressional Records Office." (House Rules and precedent have established that papers and records of each Member of Congress are "exclusively the personal property of the individual Member"; moreover, there is no such entity called the Congressional Records Office to receive or handle requests for the records of a Member's personal office.) Finally, Congresswoman Bass failed to timely disclose the value of her scholarship on her annual Financial Disclosure Reports, despite being told that the scholarship qualified as

a gift when the House Ethics Committee granted the waiver. For several years, she failed to disclose the gift at all on her federal Personal Financial Disclosure form, shielding the public

from a full picture of what she received from the School of Social Work. Congresswoman Bass now blames this glaring omission on a former staffer and says she did “not necessarily” review the forms. The omission clearly violates 5 U.S.C. app. § 102(a)(2) that requires disclosure of the identity of donors of large gifts. The House has rightfully demanded that each Member is responsible for the supervision and conduct of their office. It is troubling that a Member would seek to blame others for her own financial disclosure failures.

Such actions, if true, risk undermining the public’s confidence in our members of Congress and in our government. Members of Congress should be “ever conscious that public office is a public trust” and are expected to place loyalty to the highest moral principles and to country above loyalty to others. *Code of Ethics for Government Service* ¶¶ 1, 10. In the face of all these disturbing questions, an investigation is the only way to shed light on what exactly occurred and help restore trust in the office.

Sincerely,

Marina Torres, Esq.

Cc: Office of Congressional Ethics, 425 3rd Street, S.W., Suite 1110, Washington, DC 20024