

Questions for the Record
Charles E. Grassley of Iowa
United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Federal Courts, Oversight, Agency Action, and Federal Rights
Somali Scammers: Fighting Fraud in Minnesota and Beyond
Submitted February 11, 2026

Questions Submitted to The Honorable Kristin Robbins: Whistleblower Retaliation

On January 14, 2026, I wrote to 10 federal agencies asking about their responses to reports of fraud on the taxpayers in Minnesota and beyond. In those letters, I encouraged cabinet secretaries and other high-ranking officials in the Trump administration to protect whistleblowers as they are our greatest assets in exposing misconduct. During your testimony, in response to Senator Graham, you stated, “the state [of Minnesota] has actively harmed whistleblowers.”

Questions:

1. In which state agencies or departments have you heard about or observed whistleblower retaliation?

I have received credible whistleblower reports from employees in the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Minnesota Department of Education, Hennepin County, Ottertail County, and Beltrami County. The vast majority of these reports are from DHS and Hennepin County.

2. How many whistleblowers have been retaliated against?

In some cases, whistleblowers were verbally reprimanded for raising fraud concerns, called “racist” or “Islamophobic,” or required to take additional DEI training (note – not fraud or investigative/reporting training). In several cases, HR investigations were launched and in two cases, the whistleblowers were “perp-walked” out of the building in front of their colleagues and banned from the premises until the investigation was resolved. Both whistleblowers who went through this said it was designed to “send a message” to any other “troublemakers” and had a significant chilling effect – no one else wanted to go through that so they stopped speaking up.

Some whistleblowers report that their families have been threatened or tracked.

One whistleblower alleges he was forced to resign and move out of the state due to the harassment and fear for his family.

I’ve attached a list of whistleblower statements provided to use for the House Oversight Committee.

3. Did Governor Walz, Attorney General Ellison, Temporary Commissioner Shireen Gandhi, or Commissioner Jodi Harpstead play any role whatsoever in harming the personal, reputational, or financial interests of these whistleblowers?

Governor Walz certainly allowed and enabled this culture of retaliation by failing to support whistleblowers and hold his agency heads accountable for fraud. As Judge O'Malley, Gov. Walz' appointed Director of Program Integrity pointed out in his Feb. 2026 report on numerous occasions, DHS needs a significant culture change and should be rewarding, not retaliation against whistleblowers.

Full O'Malley Report linked here:

<https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/8uBxjTy0HUqyPbrgxj10sw.pdf>

Similar for AG Ellison – he was certainly aware of fraud allegations from Office of Legislative Auditor reports and local press, yet he does not have appeared to put out any statements in support of whistleblowers or issued any letters to agencies advising them of their duty to protect whistleblowers.

Whistleblowers report that former DHS Commissioners Gandhi and Harpstead knew of and participated in the retaliation.

4. How were whistleblowers harmed?

For some, it was loss of personal reputation and public embarrassment/harassment. For others, it was demotion, failure to be promoted, or forced resignation, which lowered retirement pension. It definitely impacted the career path/track of many. One well-regarded criminal investigator was no longer able to find a job in the field, despite being vindicated years later.

It also had a personal cost – anxiety, stress, loss of sleep, etc. Several report impacts of stress on families and children, as well.

5. Did these individuals try to blow the whistle to state officials, federal officials, or both?
Prior to a change in state law in 2025, state employees had to go through their supervisor or agency OIG to report fraud in order to get whistleblower protection. We expanded that law in 2025 to allow whistleblowers to also report to Legislators, the Office of Legislative Auditor or law enforcement and still receive whistleblower protection, which led to a significant increase in whistleblower reports.

6. Finally, if whistleblowers tried to contact federal or state officials, which agencies or offices did they contact?

I am not aware of any specific whistleblower who reached out to a federal agency, although it is possible people tried to contact CMS, Dept. of Agriculture (Feeding our Future, SNAP) or a Member of Congress.

Question Submitted to The Honorable Kristin Robbins: Executive Branch Assistance

In my letters, I also highlighted the steps that the Trump administration has taken under the leadership of Director Patel and Attorney General Bondi. You also stated that the Trump administration has provided valuable assistance to the people of Minnesota.

Question:

1. What additional steps can the Trump administration take to advance efforts to root out fraud and assist the people of Minnesota and elsewhere?

I have developed excellent partnerships with various agencies in the Trump Administration since I became Chair of the Fraud Prevention and State Agency Oversight Committee in January, 2025. All of the agencies and officials I have worked with have been very helpful and responsive, including: Vice-President JD Vance's Task Force to Eliminate Fraud, the US Department of Justice, the US Attorney's Office in the District of Minnesota, the FBI – Minneapolis Office, CMS, US Dept. of Agriculture, US Dept of Transportation.

Additional steps I have suggested include:

- Full audit of Minnesota's Medicaid waived service programs by CMS
- Ending Minnesota's waivers for telephonic verification of SNAP eligibility
- Eliminating COVID-era Medicaid waivers that allow attestation, rather than documentation, for eligibility and reduce or eliminate site visits.
- Require use of AI to flag unusual billing and require documented follow-up for all flagged providers;
- Use of AI to ensure that billing matches license capacity (where applicable).