



**Defending Democracy and Civil Rights  
in the courts and in the streets.**

Mara Verheyden-Hilliard • 617 Florida Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20001  
202.232.1180 x202 • mvh@justiceonline.org • JusticeOnline.org

September 18, 2025

The Honorable Jason Smith  
Chairman  
Committee on Ways and Means  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Via email: [Caroline.Henderson@mail.house.gov](mailto:Caroline.Henderson@mail.house.gov) , [Danny.Alonso@mail.house.gov](mailto:Danny.Alonso@mail.house.gov)

Dear Chairman Smith:

We are in receipt of your letter dated September 4, 2025, to the People's Forum, to which we are counsel. Your letter requested response by September 18, 2025. By this email we are confirming receipt and will respond to the substance of your letter after opportunity for detailed review.

As an initial matter, however, we note that this letter, rife with factual inaccuracies, appears to be part of a broad scale political attack on cherished First Amendment rights, targeting viewpoints with which the Committee leadership disagrees.

The letter openly targets specific First Amendment protected viewpoints: protests expressing opposition to the U.S. backed Israeli genocide in Gaza; opposition to the round-up of workers in the United States through ICE raids; and "protests in response to President Trump's strikes against Iran's nuclear program."

The idea that the people of the United States would not be standing against injustice except if they were directed to do so as tools of foreign actors is preposterous. It is drawn from the same dog-eared playbook long used against those who have stood for peace and civil rights, from the baseless attacks on W.E.B. Du Bois, to those who fought for desegregation or opposed the Vietnam war, to those who challenged the U.S. war in Iraq. In each instance, the opponents of civil rights and the supporters of war - now recognized as on the wrong side of history - maligned those calling for justice and peace, using similar false assertions.

In order to properly respond to your letter, we would appreciate further information as to the legislative purpose undergirding the inquiry, which on its face appears to be for the purposes of harassment and infringement on constitutionally protected rights. *See Trump v. Mazars USA, LLP*, 591 U.S. 848, 863 (2020) (Inquiries must "serve a valid legislative purpose.") (Quoting *Quinn v. United States*, 349 U.S. 155, 161 (1955)). The Court's opinion expands on this bedrock principle,

*Mazars*, 591 U.S. at 863, also quoting *Watkins v. United States*, 354 U.S. 178, 200 (1957) (“[T]here is no congressional power to expose for the sake of exposure.”) and *McGrain v. Daugherty*, 273 U.S. 135, 179 (1927) (“Congress may not use subpoenas to ‘try’ someone ‘before [a] committee for any crime or wrongdoing.’”). The Court has been unequivocal that, “Investigations conducted solely for the personal aggrandizement of the investigators or to ‘punish’ those investigated are indefensible.” *Mazars*, 591 U.S. at 863, quoting *Watkins*, 354 U.S. 178, 187.

We have serious concerns about the nature of the requests being issued and the intrusion on First Amendment protected rights and privileges.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mara Verheyden-Hilliard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mara Verheyden-Hilliard