Dear Chair Feinstein, Vice-Chair Chambliss, Chair Rogers, and Ranking Member Ruppersberger,

The undersigned organizations, concerned with government openness and accountability, write to urge you to protect the interests of an open government and informed public in any legislation to address the leaks of highly classified information. Congress’ goal of protecting the United States’ legitimate secrets is honorable, but it would be unwise to accelerate the process without due consideration to the range of issues entangled in addressing the leak issue.

The legislation will necessarily touch on a number of delicate issues that merit careful consideration. These issues include the balance between reducing security clearances and rightful disclosure, as well as ensuring that classified systems are not clogged with information that does not need rigorous protections. Additionally, the legislation must protect people who blow the whistle on waste, fraud and abuse in the federal government. Seeking input from the public and experts in the field will help Congress ensure that any legislation intended to stop leaks of classified national security information appropriately addresses the potential ramifications of language to address the unauthorized disclosures of highly classified information.

We understand you intend to attach your legislation to the Fiscal Year (FY) FY 2013 Intelligence Authorization Bill. While we recognize that leaks of appropriately and properly classified information are a serious problem, the American public requires access to some information about government conduct in order to foster an informed and meaningful national discussion, particularly about such issues as the use of drones to kill American citizens and other persons. We ask Congress to address these leaks with the most serious of consideration and widest possible public input. We strongly urge you to not rush such important legislation even if the needed careful consideration is not possible before the FY 2013 Intelligence Authorization bill must be passed.

We thank you for your consideration and urge you to address the leaks of highly classified information with the widest possible public input into any legislation and with the most open process possible.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union
American Library Association
Article 19

Bill of Rights Defense Committee
Brennan Center for Justice
Brown Center for Public Policy
Center for Media and Democracy
The Center for Financial Privacy and Human Rights
Common Cause
The Constitution Project
Defending Dissent
Electronic Frontier Foundation
Electronic Privacy Information Coalition
Federation of American Scientists
Government Accountability Project
iSolon.org
Liberty Coalition
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
National Freedom of Information Coalition
National Security Archive
National Whistleblowers Center
No More Guantanamos
OpenTheGovernment.org
Project on Government Oversight
Progressive Librarians Guild
Society of American Archivists
Society of Professional Journalists
Sunlight Foundation
Utah Foundation for Open Government
Washington Coalition for Open Government