

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 4, 2019

Mr. John V. Kelly
Acting Inspector General
Department of Homeland Security
Office of Inspector General
245 Murray Lane SW
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Mr. Kelly:

We write to request that you review the vetting processes used by federal officials at Mar-a-Lago to protect the President from potential national security threats. Our request comes in the wake of a report yesterday that “Secret Service agents arrested a Chinese woman after she bypassed layers of security and gained access to the reception area of President Trump’s Florida resort this past weekend, saying they found she was carrying two passports and a thumb drive containing malicious software, according to court documents.” After being stopped by the Secret Service, she claimed that “a Chinese friend instructed her to travel from Shanghai to the president’s Florida resort and make contact with a member of Trump’s family.”¹

The troubling report from earlier this week follows last month’s news that Li “Cindy” Yang, a “frequent visitor” to the President’s Florida resort and a member of his Mar-a-Lago club, “created and operated a business that sold Chinese business executives access to President Donald Trump and his family at Mar-a-Lago.”² Reports suggest that Ms. Yang “was willing to publicly align herself with the Chinese Communist Party and [the United Front Work Department,] one of its primary political influence mechanisms.”³

According to one expert, “The president is a unique foreign intelligence target for adversaries, and those in close orbit around him are also important targets, and Mar-a-Lago appears to be a very wide aperture for possible penetration.”⁴ This past weekend’s arrest, the activities of Ms.

¹ Boston Globe, “Woman with Chinese passports, malware arrested at Trump’s Mar-a-Lago resort,” Devlin Barrett, April 02, 2019, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2019/04/02/woman-with-chinese-passports-malware-arrested-trump-mar-lago-resort/qFztgdKn7rnoblC70xT9YM/story.html>.

² Mother Jones, “The Massage Parlor Owner Peddling Access to Trump Has Ties to Chinese Government-Linked Groups,” Daniel Schulman, David Corn, and Dan Friedman, March 10, 2019, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2019/03/the-massage-parlor-owner-peddling-access-to-trump-has-ties-to-chinese-government-linked-groups-cindy-yang/>; Washington Post, “Former spa owner and frequent Mar-a-Lago guest sparks concerns about ‘porous’ environment at president’s club,” Michelle Ye Hee Lee, Emily Rauhala, Lori Rozsa and Josh Dawsey, March 15, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/former-spa-owner-and-frequent-mar-a-lago-guest-sparks-concerns-about-porous-environment-at-presidents-club/2019/03/14/19c955a6-442e-11e9-aaf8-4512a6fe3439_story.html?utm_term=.4d10d55a0b97.

³ Foreign Policy, “Republican Donor Cindy Yang Linked to Chinese Influence Machine,” Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, March 12, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/12/962067-china-unitedfront-corruption-scandal/>.

⁴ David Kriss, quoted in Washington Post, “Former spa owner and frequent Mar-a-Lago guest sparks concerns about ‘porous’ environment at president’s club,” Michelle Ye Hee Lee, Emily Rauhala, Lori Rozsa and Josh Dawsey, March 15, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/former-spa-owner-and-frequent-mar-a-lago-guest-sparks-concerns-about-porous-environment-at-presidents-club/2019/03/14/19c955a6-442e-11e9-aaf8-4512a6fe3439_story.html?utm_term=.4d10d55a0b97.

Yang, and reports that reveal “Mar-a-Lago as a porous party destination accessible to anyone with the right contacts or a few hundred dollars”⁵ have “renewed questions about security at the seaside resort that serves as Trump’s home away from Washington — and about who can gain the ear of the president and his allies for the price of a ticket to a Mar-a-Lago event.”⁶

In February 2017, Sen. Warren requested a GAO investigation of security at Mar-a-Lago. This investigation, which was released two months ago, provided important insight into this process. It revealed (in a publicly available version of the report), that the Secret Service is primarily responsible for establishing the physical security of the President and the facilities where he lives and visits. This “physical screening includes the use of equipment such as wands and magnetometers to secure the property.”⁷ In addition, “Background checks assess in part whether an individual has a history of criminal activity. In some cases, enhanced background checks identify other types of threats.” But the ultimate decision on who is allowed access to the President is not made by the Secret Service, but by the White House. According to GAO:

The Secret Service has a process requiring vetting of individuals who are expected to be within close proximity of the President for a planned purpose or in certain secure areas...Individuals who are expected to meet the President are to undergo a background check and an enhanced background check. Officials from the Secret Service said that they are responsible for collecting the findings from these checks ... the Executive Office of the President is responsible for identifying individuals who are expected to meet with the President ... the Secret Service will make a recommendation to the Executive Office of the President on whether an individual should be granted access to the President ... **the Executive Office of the President ultimately determines whether or not an individual should be granted access to the President.**⁸

The GAO report identified no shortcomings in the role and activities of the Secret Service. But the Executive Office of the President did not cooperate with the GAO investigation, refusing to respond to all requests for information.⁹

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/former-spa-owner-and-frequent-mar-a-lago-guest-sparks-concerns-about-porous-environment-at-presidents-club/2019/03/14/19c955a6-442e-11e9-aaf8-4512a6fe3439_story.html?utm_term=.4d10d55a0b97.

⁵ Palm Beach Post, “Not just Cindy Yan: Royals, felon, pop stars, others got access to Trump’s Mar-a-Lago,” Christine Stapleton, March 20, 2019, <https://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/20190320/not-just-cindy-yang-royals-felon-pop-stars-others-got-access-to-trumps-mar-a-lago>.

⁶ Washington Post, “Former spa owner and frequent Mar-a-Lago guest sparks concerns about ‘porous’ environment at president’s club,” Michelle Ye Hee Lee, Emily Rauhala, Lori Rozsa and Josh Dawsey, March 15, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/former-spa-owner-and-frequent-mar-a-lago-guest-sparks-concerns-about-porous-environment-at-presidents-club/2019/03/14/19c955a6-442e-11e9-aaf8-4512a6fe3439_story.html?utm_term=.4d10d55a0b97.

⁷ United States Government Accountability Office, “Presidential Security: Vetting of Individuals and Secure Areas at Mar-a-Lago,” January 2019, p. 10.

⁸ United States Government Accountability Office, “Presidential Security: Vetting of Individuals and Secure Areas at Mar-a-Lago,” January 2019, p.11.

⁹ United States Government Accountability Office, “Presidential Security: Vetting of Individuals and Secure Areas at Mar-a-Lago,” January 2019, p. 10.

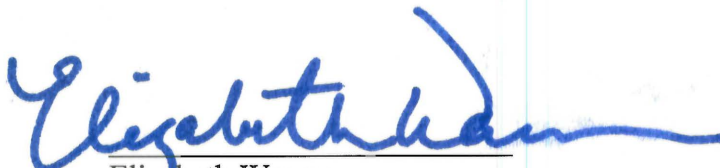
⁹ United States Government Accountability Office, “Presidential Security: Vetting of Individuals and Secure Areas at Mar-a-Lago,” January 2019, p.5.

This refusal of the White House to cooperate with this investigation, combined with this past weekend's arrest and other allegations of easy access to the President and his family at Mar-a-Lago, means that at least one key question remains open: is the White House appropriately reviewing and making the correct recommendations regarding which individuals are granted access to the President, at Mar-a-Lago and elsewhere?

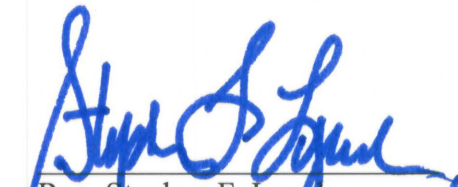
We therefore request that you conduct an investigation into this matter. This investigation should include an assessment of

1. Whether the Secret Service is being appropriately notified of individuals who may or will have access to the President at Mar-a-Lago or elsewhere.
2. Whether the Secret Service is able to conduct appropriate background checks of individuals with access to the President (including enhanced background checks when indicated), and whether, based on these background checks, they provide any recommendations to the White House about whether these individuals should be granted access to the President.
3. Whether the Secret Service has recommended against granting any of these individuals access to the President, and if so, why the agency did so.
4. Whether the White House followed the recommendations of the Secret Service regarding individuals that the agency recommended should not have been granted access to the President.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Rep. Stephen F. Lynch
Chairman, Subcommittee on
National Security