Statement of Sean William O'Donnell
Nominated to be Inspector General,
Office of Inspector General
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Carper, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as the nominee for Inspector General of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Chemical Safety Board. It is a profound honor.

I am grateful to the President and to Administrator Wheeler for the confidence they have shown in nominating me for this important position. In many ways, I have been preparing for this position for most of my professional career. I am also grateful for the time the Members of this Committee and their staff made to meet with me as part of my nomination.

I would also like to thank my family, friends, and colleagues for the support they have shown. With me today is my wife of nearly 25 years, Dr. Cynthia Finley. I have known Cynthia since seventh grade, when we first met in Ms. DeWitt's honors English class. You remain the smartest person I know. And you have made me the luckiest. Also here with me today are my four children, Brigid, age 13, Fintan, age 11, Molly, age 9, and Aine, age 7. You bring so much joy to my life and I am incredibly proud of each of you.

Being here today represents a milestone in a long journey. I grew up far away from Washington, DC, in the northwestern part of Washington State. And I am the proud grandson, son, brother, and uncle of four generations of O'Donnells who have worked at the Port of Seattle. Growing up in a family of stevedores instilled in me the value of hard work and plain speaking.

I have always believed that public service is a high calling. This is why, over fifteen years ago, I jumped at the opportunity to work for the U.S. Department of Justice and to represent the United States of America. During my time in the Department, I have had the privilege to work on some of the most interesting and complex matters facing our nation. But what I have always found most rewarding is seeing how my cases can make the lives of our fellow Americans better.

One of the first matters I handled at the Department was *United States v. Euclid*, a Voting Rights Act case. Despite having a significant African-American population, the city had never elected an African-American preferred candidate. My colleagues and I worked tirelessly to vindicate the voting rights of black voters, developing a compelling case by following the facts and listening to local voters, candidates, and government officials. The results speak for themselves. Since the United States prevailed, the City has elected a diverse and far more representative city council. When you see the good that government can do, it washes away the cynicism that seems so prevalent nowadays.

I have always strived to lead investigations in a fair, objective, and thorough manner, going where the facts lead no matter how uncomfortable the result. For example, in 2013, I joined the Residential Mortgage Backed Security Working Group, which was formed to bring some measure of justice to those who had participated in one of the biggest frauds in our history. To do so, we used creative statutory and investigative tools to dive deep into highly complex securities. At its height, our investigative team consisted of approximately 30 attorneys, agents, and analysts from a variety of agencies, including two inspector general offices. In less than two years, our team reviewed nearly 10 million documents, analyzed gigabytes of data, and interviewed scores of individuals. We untangled a mess of deals to uncover a systemic pattern of making false and misleading statements about the quality of the mortgage loans underlying the securities. And we ultimately held the investment bank to account for a multi-billion dollar fine and a statement of facts that clearly and plainly set out the basis for that fine.

As another example, I helped lead several investigations focusing on the servicing of reverse mortgages. As I am sure you are aware, these are financial instruments that are intended to allow older Americans to access equity in their homes. Working with a number of IG offices, including HUD OIG, we were able to uncover systemic fraud and misrepresentations to the FHA. We achieved settlements across numerous corporations, resulting in over $130 million returned to the Treasury. But just as significant as any money recovered, our settlements resulted in important and lasting change in the industry.

In my work, I often ponder what Justice Holme's words in *Rockland Island*, that people must turn square corners when dealing with the Government. For me, it has two meanings. First, it means that the Government depends on the integrity and honesty of those who deal with it. It also means that we, in the Government, must be fair and honest when we deal with the public. I firmly believe that the best way we instill confidence in those we have the honor of serving is by conducting our business with integrity.

In my experience, the OIG auditors, agents, and attorneys I have had the privilege of working with exemplify this commitment to integrity. To a person, I have found that they share a passion for fighting waste, fraud, and abuse. And I have found that they are equally committed to providing independent and objective oversight of their departments and agencies.

For this reason, I come before you today seeking your support to become the Environmental Protection Agency's inspector general. The EPA serves a critical role as steward of our environment. To this end, it has been entrusted with the most important statutes enacted to improve the quality of our daily lives and protect our health, including the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Safe Drinking Water Act. The result of the EPA's work is evident in the air we breathe and the water we drink. Every year, my children and I see the impact of EPA's work in my own neighborhood, as we fish in the Anacostia River and as we see the water become cleaner and the fish healthier.

It would be an honor to lead the EPA's Office of Inspector General as it contributes to the Agency's important mission. If confirmed, I will strive to continue the office's work in eliminating waste, fraud, and abuse. I will also focus the office's efforts to promote the efficient and effective use of the authority you have granted the EPA. And I will do so while maintaining a positive relationship with you and the rest of the Congress.

Thank you again for this opportunity to appear before you today. I sincerely appreciate your consideration of my nomination and I look forward to answering your questions.