WASHINGTON – Senator Chuck Grassley has asked 20 law firms in Philadelphia for information about their billing of the Philadelphia Public Housing Authority as part of a larger review of how the housing authority has misused federal tax dollars. Grassley said he is going directly to the firms for information about the amount billed and the kind of work performed because the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which awards federal funds to local housing authorities, has told him it doesn't maintain records about such legal payments and, in the case of the Philadelphia Public Housing Authority, news organizations have reported how the housing authority structured settlements in at least four sexual harassment cases and one case where the failure to inspect a building before demolition resulted in the death of a resident.

"The local housing authority reportedly has a record of trying to cover its tracks where it's spent tax dollars either inappropriately or in a way that would embarrass its leadership. And, the federal agency that provides most of the money that local housing authorities have to spend has continued to provide tax dollars even after it's clear that there's not responsible stewardship of those dollars," Grassley said. "Both situations are an affront to taxpayers, and taxpayers deserve an accounting of what's gone on so that it can be stopped."

Grassley's review of abusive spending of federal housing dollars was prompted by the dramatic increase in federal funds going to local housing authorities, even those with histories of mismanagement, by way of the federal government's economic stimulus program.

A copy of the letter Grassley sent today is available by clicking here . The same letter went to the following Philadelphia law firms: Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis LLP; Ballard Spahr Andrews & Ingersoll, LLP; Cozen O'Connor; Duane Morris LLP; Fox Rothschild; Buchanon, Ingersol & Rooney PC; Blank Rome LLP ; Eckert, Seamans, Cherin & Mellot, LLC; Bowman Kavulich; Archer & Greiner; Margolis Edelstein; Reed Smith LLP; Haines & Associates; Kolber & Freiman; Flaster/Greenberg; Cohen & Grigsby; Greenberg Traurig, LLP; Hangley Aronchick Segal & Pudlin; Kelly, Monaco & Naples; and Smyler & Gentile. Previous letters from Grassley regarding the expenditures of the Philadelphia Housing Authority are available by clicking here
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Last week, the Philadelphia Daily News reported that in September 2009, the then-executive director of the Philadelphia Housing Authority had spent $15,920 on expensive bags from Nordstrom for himself and 19 other executives of the housing authority.

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