

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

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February 27, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We are writing to express our opposition to your reckless and illegal termination of an estimated 1,300 probationary employees at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) thus far.¹ This mass termination of a reported 1,300 employees represents nearly 10 percent of CDC's workforce.² We are deeply concerned these widespread terminations took place without any review of these employees' work history or without any analysis of the impacts these job losses would have on the Department's ability to protect that health and well-being of the American people. Future extreme, arbitrary, and unlawful layoffs will further endanger the agency's mission to protect public health.³

These terminations create a threat to the foundation of our country's public health systems and will leave us less safe and less secure at a time when we are facing significant public health threats. Currently, our nation is facing the worst measles outbreak in Texas in 30 years, and concerning cases of avian influenza A (H5NI), and a highly contagious strain of

¹ National Public Radio, *Staff at CDC and NIH are reeling as Trump administration cuts workforce* (Feb. 14, 2025). (<https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/02/14/nx-s1-5297913/cdc-layoffs-hhs-trump-doge>).

² NBC Washington, *CDC to lose one-tenth of workforce under Trump admin probationary job cuts* (Feb. 14, 2025) (<https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/politics/cdc-trump-admin-probationary-job-cuts/3845489/>).

³ Associated Press, *The Trump administration sets the stage for large-scale federal worker layoffs in a new memo* (Feb. 26, 2025).

monkeypox.^{4,5,6} We request immediate answers to understand the nature and scope of these terminations, your authority to undertake these terminations, and whether you have conducted any analysis of the impact these terminations will have on the readiness of the CDC workforce to counter current and future public health threats.

CDC's workers are vital in promoting and protecting our health, preventing disease domestically and abroad, as well as providing a state-level and community-level response to public health emergencies. Over the past few weeks alone, the Administration's failure to contain and disseminate timely information about the ongoing bird flu outbreak is having ripple effects for American families, with escalating H5N1 creating a soaring spike in the price of household goods like eggs.^{7,8} CDC workers' ability to monitor and address these threats for the benefit of American families will surely be impacted by your recent arbitrary and seemingly indiscriminate staff purges.

CDC personnel work to prevent infectious disease outbreaks, promote healthy behaviors, and intervene in chronic disease management. Ninety percent of the nation's \$4.5 trillion in annual health care expenditures are for people with chronic health conditions.⁹ The CDC is at the forefront of funding prevention screenings for chronic conditions and provides workforce training to local health departments on screening and prevention.¹⁰ We are seeking information from the Administration on whether you have done any analyses to inform your termination decisions. We also want to know if the Administration has devised plans on how you plan to continue to deliver services at the state and local level for key public health programs. For example, programs like the World Trade Center Health Program (serving 130,000 people in all 50 states), the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP) (in all 50 states), the National and State Tobacco Control Program (the only nationwide initiative for comprehensive tobacco prevention and control efforts that supports all 50 states), and the Colorectal Cancer screening program (operating in 20 states).¹¹

⁴ Centers for Disease Control, *Mpox in the United States and Around the World: Current Situation* (<https://www.cdc.gov/mpox/situation-summary/index.html>) (accessed Feb. 21, 2025).

⁵ Centers for Disease Control, *H5 Bird Flu: Current Situation* (<https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/index.html>) (accessed Feb. 21, 2025).

⁶ Associated Press, *Texas measles outbreak rises to 48 cases. It's the state's worst in nearly 30 years* (Feb. 14, 2025) (<https://apnews.com/article/measles-texas-mmr-vaccine-homeschooling-b29d08d53cf26704968e8c00dfa712ba>).

⁷ *Trump Administration Temporarily Mutes Federal Health Officials*, The New York Times (Jan. 22, 2025).

⁸ CBS News, *What to know about bird flu in 2025, from how it's spread to symptoms and egg impacts* (Feb. 13, 2025) (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/bird-flu-2025-symptoms-eggs-humans/>).

⁹ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, *National Health Expenditure Data: Historical* (<https://www.cms.gov/data-research/statistics-trends-and-reports/national-health-expenditure-data/historical>) (accessed Feb. 6, 2025).

¹⁰ de Beaumont Foundation and Public Health National Center for Innovations, *Staffing Up: Investing in Public Health Workforce* (Oct. 2021).

¹¹ Center for Disease Control, *Health and Economic Benefits of Chronic Disease Interventions* (May 15, 2024).

In addition to these and many other evidence-based interventions to prevent and manage chronic diseases, CDC operates programs to directly support and provide technical assistance to state and local health departments on the prevention and containment of infectious diseases and food-borne illnesses, such as current *Listeria*, *Salmonella*, and *E. Coli* cases the United States. Direct staffing programs such as the CDC's Preparedness Field Assignees program, the Epidemiological Intelligence Services, the Public Health Associate Program, and the Laboratory Leadership Service, strengthen critical capabilities in local health departments and public health laboratories. It appears they are slated for elimination, although it is unclear from conflicting agency pronouncements, tweets from Elon Musk, and news reports.^{12,13,14} We are seeking information from your agency on whether you intend to eliminate these programs, and if so, what analyses you have performed on the capacity of CDC and state and local health departments to address current public health threats. We also want to know how you plan to ensure continued capacity to detect outbreaks of these foodborne and other infectious diseases while indiscriminately cutting essential staff.

Given the enormous consequences that sweeping layoffs at CDC will have on our nation's public health infrastructure, we request detailed responses and all Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)-wide memorandums, no later than March 10, 2025, on:

1. The total number of probationary and non-probationary employees terminated from CDC since Thursday, February 13, 2025. Specify the number of employees in both classifications terminated from each CDC center, department, and program, and indicate the percentage of the workforce assigned to each center, department, and program represented by the workers who have now been terminated.
2. Are there additional layoffs planned for CDC employees at this time, including those directed by the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of Personnel Management in the February 26, 2025, memorandum?¹⁵ If further resignation or termination requests are ordered, how many additional layoffs are expected? Specify the total number of layoffs by center, department, and program at CDC.
3. How many of the positions that are now vacant will be permanently eliminated and how many positions will be filled by new personnel? Specify each total by center, department, and program at CDC.

¹² U.S. News, *Layoffs Hit Lab Program at CDC That Was Started to Prevent Previous Failures* (Feb. 18, 2025) (<https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2025-02-18/layoffs-hit-many-at-cdc-lab-program-that-was-started-to-address-previous-failures>).

¹³ The Seattle Times, *Trump cuts target next generation of scientists and public health leaders* (Feb. 18, 2025) (<https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/trump-cuts-target-next-generation-of-scientists-and-public-health-leaders/>).

¹⁴ The New York Times, *Trump Cuts Target Next Generation of Scientists and Public Health Leaders* (Feb. 18, 2025) (<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/18/us/politics/fda-cdc-health-department-trump.html>).

¹⁵ U.S. Office of Management and Budget and U.S. Office of Personnel Management, *Guidance on Agency RIF and Reorganization Plans Requested by Implementing The President's "Department of Government Efficiency" Workforce Optimization Initiative* (Feb. 26, 2025).

4. What role did the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) have in identifying or prioritizing employees for termination? What metrics did they use?
5. How many employees were terminated who are responsible for responding either domestically or globally to the first clade 1b monkeypox outbreak?
 - a. Did the agency conduct any analysis of the current and future staffing needs to address the threat of monkeypox prior to the terminations? If so, please provide such analyses; if not, please state that no such analyses were conducted.
 - b. Please provide a detailed plan on how CDC intends to effectively prevent further spread of monkeypox despite the layoffs.
6. How many employees were terminated who are responsible for responding to the measles outbreak in Texas?
 - a. Did the agency conduct any analysis of the current and future staffing needs to address the threat of measles outbreaks prior to the terminations? If so, please provide such analyses; if not, please state that no such analyses were conducted.
 - b. Please provide a detailed plan on how CDC intends to address current and future measles outbreaks domestically despite the layoffs.
7. How many employees were terminated who are responsible for foodborne illness surveillance, data collection and response?
 - a. Did the agency conduct any analysis of the current and future staffing needs to address the threat of foodborne illness in the United States? If so, please provide such analyses; if not, please state that no such analyses were conducted.
 - b. Please provide a detailed plan on how CDC intends to effectively prevent current and future outbreaks of foodborne illness despite the layoffs.
8. Recent reports note that between terminations and buyouts, there is a 20 percent reduction in staff for the World Trade Health Center Program (WTHCP), run by the National Institutes of Occupation Safety and Health (NIOSH) at the CDC. How many WTHCP positions were terminated since February 13, 2025, and how many positions are now vacant due to early retirement buyout decisions accepted by February 6, 2025?
 - a. Did the agency conduct any analysis of the current and future staffing needs to of the 9/11 health program prior to conducting the terminations? If so, please provide such analyses; if not, please state that no such analyses were conducted.
 - b. Please include a detailed plan on how CDC plans to ensure that there will not be any limits or delays in the program's support of 9/11 first responders or survivors despite the staff layoffs.

9. CDC, in collaboration with federal, state, and local partners, has been actively engaged in a coordinated response to outbreaks of avian influenza H5N1 in the United States. How many positions with specific H5N1 surveillance, testing, or technical support responsibilities were terminated since February 13, 2025, and how many positions are now vacant due to early retirement buyout decisions accepted by February 6, 2025?
 - a. Did the agency conduct any analysis of the current and future staffing needs to address the threat of H5N1 in the United States? If so, please provide such analyses; if not, please state that no such analyses were conducted.
 - b. Please include a detailed plan on how CDC intends to effectively address the threat of H5N1 despite the layoffs.
10. List any research, data collection, public campaigns or surveillance programs that have been paused or suspended or had their mission altered at CDC because of the recent layoffs, beginning February 13, 2025.
11. Under 5 C.F.R. 315.803(a), probationary employees can be terminated “if the employee fails to demonstrate fully his or her qualifications for continued employment.” Please document the steps that the Department has taken to align recent terminations with these requirements under law.
12. Under 5 CFR 315.803(b), probationary employees who are terminated must be notified in writing as to the “inadequacies of [their] performance of conduct.” Please provide copies of each letter documenting the inadequacies in each terminated employee’s performance since the beginning of the probationary period. If multiple employees were identified as having the same performance inadequacy, please provide the template letter the Department sent and how many staff received the same letter.
13. Federal law prohibits the partisan dismissal of probationary employees, and the Federal circuit has identified a right to appeal termination decisions when the action was a result of partisan politics.^{16,17} President Trump has called his efforts to purge

¹⁶ 5 CFR 315.806(b). *See Stokes v. Aff*, 761 F.2d 682 (probationary staff can appeal decisions when the action was a result of partisan politics).

¹⁷ Letter from Mike Zamore, National Directory of Policy and Government Affairs; Kia Hamadancy, Senior Policy Counsel; Monica Hopkins, Executive Director of the ACLU of the District of Columbia, American Civil Liberties Union, to Sen. Rand Paul, Chair, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee; Sen. Gary C. Peters, Ranking Member, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee; Rep. James Comer, Chair, House Committee on Oversight and Accountability; Rep. Gerald E. Connolly, Ranking Member, House Committee on Oversight and Accountability (Feb. 7, 2025).

career workers in the government “retribution” and disparaged them for undermining his power.^{18,19} Given this,

- a. What process has HHS put in place to process appeals?
- b. How many appeals have been filed since the terminations began?
- c. How many terminations have been reversed and how many have been sustained?

As the Secretary of HHS, we ask you to reconsider these ill-advised terminations, and to consider and take seriously the momentous responsibility you have for protecting public health. The impending impact of these terminations, including exposing Americans to greater death and illness due to outbreaks of foodborne illness and infectious disease, will fall on your shoulders.

Sincerely,



Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce



Diana DeGette
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health

¹⁸ C-Span, *Clip: Former Pres. Trump: “I Am Your Justice...I Am Your Retribution”* (Mar. 4, 2023) (<https://www.c-span.org/clip/campaign-2024/former-pres-trump-i-am-your-justicei-am-your-retribution/5060238>).

¹⁹ Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, *Trump has said he wants to destroy the “deep state” 56 times on Truth Social* (Aug. 1, 2024) (<https://www.citizensforethics.org/reports-investigations/crew-investigations/trump-has-said-he-wants-to-destroy-the-deep-state-56-times-on-truth-social/>).