

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 23, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We are writing regarding the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) and Department of Government Efficiency's (DOGE) so-called Defend the Spend initiative. We are deeply concerned that this initiative and its abrupt implementation will lead to massive amounts of inefficient bureaucratic red tape.

As reported in the *Washington Post* on April 17, 2025, Defend the Spend is a new layer of bureaucratic review on grants that have already been determined to be meritorious and awarded.¹ Grantees across the country have reached out to me and to my colleagues confused about why requested drawdowns have not paid out. Many received no communication at all about Defend the Spend and thus were unable to comply with new processes for which there was no robust communications strategy or public input. In addition, the *Post* reports that as of April 17, 2025, some HHS agencies have implemented this new process but have not designated individuals to carry out the process, leading to delays in payments.

Furthermore, it is clear that HHS is aware that it is misleading grantees about the current status of drawdown requests. As reported in the *Washington Post* article dated April 17, a National Institutes of Health official was quoted as saying "all funding is on hold" in a meeting that concerned grants. The official went on to be quoted as stating, "the bottom line is no one is getting any money right now. But they don't know they're not getting any money because it just says that it's 'in transit.'"

As of April 21, there was no mention of Defend the Spend on HHS' website. Some grantees have reported receiving emails from defendthespend@hhs.gov with brief instructions; however, instructions have been piecemeal and lacking in detail. The only public communications about Defend the Spend appear to be a pair of tweets from DOGE.²

This new and unwarranted imposition of red tape does not appear to provide any meaningful benefit to the government, grantees, or the public. Instead, it requires public servants and grantee institutions to waste time justifying expenditures that have already gone through a rigorous review process.

Please provide answers to the following questions regarding Defend the Spend no later than May 7, 2025:

1. Did HHS identify specific instances of improper payments prior to adding new burdensome steps to the drawdown process? Please detail those improper payments.
2. Did HHS conduct an analysis of the cost and time burden both for the government and for grantees prior to imposing Defend the Spend? If so, what were the findings of this analysis?
3. How has HHS communicated the current status of drawdown requests to grantee institutions? Has HHS clarified to all affected grantees that some drawdowns that appear to be in transit are being held up by Defend the Spend? Please provide copies of all emails, notices, or any other guidance.

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/04/17/doge-trump-grants-hhs-nih-backlog/>

² <https://x.com/DOGE/status/1911208855066849712>, <https://x.com/DOGE/status/1898957551330533797>

4. What guidance has HHS provided to grantee institutions about how to make their draws? Please provide copies of all emails, notices, or any other guidance.
5. Who is ultimately responsible for approving drawdowns with respect to grants made by each Operating Division?
6. What factors are considered in whether to approve or deny a drawdown in this new layer of the drawdown approval process? Please provide copies of all emails, notices, or any other guidance detailing the decision making for the new approval process.
7. Are political appointees within HHS, HHS Staff or Operating Divisions, or entities external to HHS (such as DOGE) involved in this process? If so, who and what is their role?
8. Is there an appeals process in place for draws that are improperly denied due to this new process? Please provide copies of all emails, notices, or any other guidance detailing the appeals process.

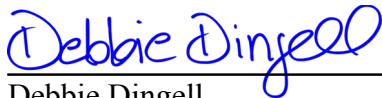
Furthermore, we reiterate that it is necessary for you to testify in front of Congress immediately. You must answer for the unstudied, unjustified, and often illegal actions that HHS has taken since your confirmation. Congress's oversight authority and your duty to the American people demand no less.

We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



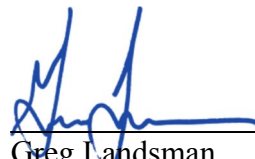
Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress



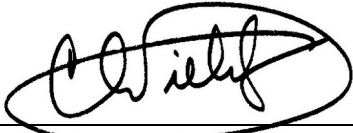
Kelly Morrison
Member of Congress



Jason Crow
Member of Congress



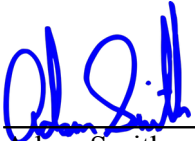
Greg Landsman
Member of Congress



Cleo Fields
Member of Congress



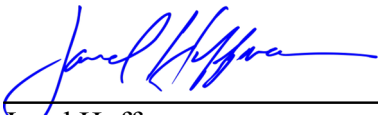
Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Adam Smith
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



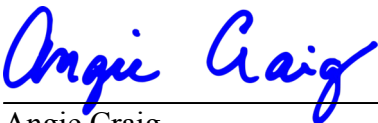
Julie Johnson
Member of Congress



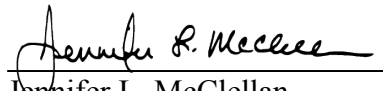
Darren Soto
Member of Congress



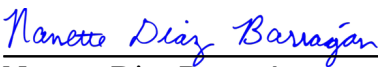
Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



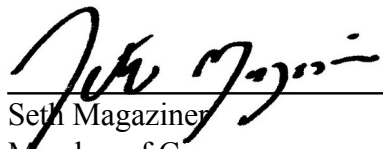
Angie Craig
Member of Congress



Jennifer L. McClellan
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress



Maxine Dexter
Member of Congress



Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. McBride', written over a horizontal line.

Sarah McBride
Member of Congress