

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 14, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

We write to express our deep concern with the Trump administration's recent decisions to indiscriminately fire critical public health employees at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), based in Atlanta, Georgia. As you know, the CDC also has a national and global reach, with a robust network of CDC staff on the ground in states, territories and tribal communities across the country, and offices in over 60 countries, partnering with the public health workforce to improve public health delivery and our response to emerging threats.

These actions have not only led to unnecessary turmoil, fear, and chaos for public health officials, experts, and employees at the CDC, they also threaten our national security and disrupt our economy. The mass firings and instability at the CDC could directly impact public health initiatives in our states, particularly in responding to disease outbreaks and funding local health programs. While we are encouraged to learn that some recently fired CDC employees have since been reinstated, we urge you to immediately reverse all firings, to reinstate all CDC personnel who were unfairly and recklessly terminated, and to halt all additional mass terminations at the CDC.

The CDC has a long history of bolstering public health preparedness and protecting the American people. In 1946, Dr. Joseph Mountin opened the doors of the CDC (then known as the Communicable Disease Center) to help combat the malaria epidemic in the South.¹ Since then, the CDC has worked tirelessly for over 75 years to respond to public health threats including: deploying public health workers to respond to 9/11 and the anthrax attacks, leveraging experts to respond to the largest Ebola outbreak in global history, and activating opioid overdose response resources to states and localities.²

Despite the CDC's critical responsibility and record of keeping Americans safe, one of your very first actions as Secretary was overseeing the firing of an estimated 750 public servants at CDC. We are deeply troubled by the complete disregard for public health and health promotion

¹ Our History – Our Story, *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, <https://www.cdc.gov/museum/history/our-story.html>

² The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Putting Prevention into Public Health Practice, *CDC*, https://www.cdc.gov/washington/media/pdfs/2025/01/357075-B_Why-CDC_Factsheet.pdf.

displayed by these mass firings. Many of these individuals, due to their level of expertise and experience, are difficult, if not impossible, to replace. These actions will have long-term consequences in recruiting the next generation of public health leaders, a field that was already facing a deficit of 40,000 employees.³

For example, the CDC's Laboratory Leadership Service (LLS) was completely decimated after fellows received notices on February 15 about their terminations, effective March 14.⁴ LLS fellows work in state and local health departments to help train lab staff on testing for various infectious diseases. During the Ebola response, LLS fellows provided support to international ministries of health for the handling of specimens and laboratory operations, helping to largely prevent the spread of Ebola to the United States.⁵

In addition to the termination of LLS staff, employees with the Public Health Associate Program for Recent Graduates (PHAP) were terminated in February as a result of DOGE's reckless mass firings. PHAP employs over 100 associates working across all 50 states, territories, and Washington, D.C to provide important public health support to local health departments. One fellow in North Carolina cited her desire to work in public health as a recent college graduate and, without PHAP, would not have been able to enter the field. Another PHAP fellow in Indiana aided a team focused on efforts to combat the opioid epidemic, helping the organization apply for federal grants.⁶ PHAP not only helps connect future leaders to careers in public health but also provides important services for local health departments.

To add to an already tumultuous situation, we note that CDC has scrambled to rehire some employees recently terminated.⁷ This chaotic personnel action only confirms the reckless and thoughtless nature with which the Administration undertook its initial indiscriminate firings, and the Administration must immediately reinstate all terminated employees to safeguard American and global public health.

We are also concerned about the recent direction from the Office of Personnel Management to agencies and departments to identify additional staff to be fired as part of a large-scale reduction in force effort. This haphazard attempt at making the government more efficient is having the exact opposite effect. Cutting these critical staff at CDC will result in slower outbreak responses, delayed funding to state and local jurisdictions looking to improve the health and well-being of their communities, and delayed communication on pressing issues for communities.

³ State Actions to Bolster the Public Health Workforce, *National Conference Of State Legislatures*, (Nov. 14, 2024), <https://www.ncsl.org/health/state-actions-to-bolster-the-public-health-workforce>

⁴ Sophie Gardner, 'A pretty big gap': CDC cut employees working on lab safety, improving testing, *PoliticoPro*, (Feb. 27, 2025), <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2025/02/a-pretty-big-gap-cdc-cut-employees-working-on-lab-safety-improving-testing-00206089>

⁵ What Fellows Do, CDC Laboratory Leadership Service, <https://www.cdc.gov/lls/php/our-work/index.html>

⁶ Associates' Stories, CDC Public Health Associate Program for Recent Graduates (PHAP), <https://www.cdc.gov/phap/php/story/index.html>

⁷ Mike Stobbe, 'Read this e-mail immediately': CDC tells about 180 fired employees to come back to work, *Associated Press*, (Mar. 5, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/cdc-reinstatements-c1f0b33d677e5a02a4df1210b82ca930>

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

Additionally, studies show that investing in public health boosts the economy. For every \$1 invested, research demonstrated an estimated \$88 in benefits to communities.⁸

While the Administration has since taken steps to reinstate some of these employees, the upheaval and chaos that your leadership has enacted thus far on hardworking public health workers across the country, with more cuts to come, has made the past few months a frightening, uncertain, and dangerous time for our constituents. Therefore, we ask for your clarification and action on the following questions:

1. How many CDC employees have been fired since January 20, 2025? How many have been reinstated as of March 14, 2025?
2. Why has the CDC not reinstated all employees who have been terminated?
3. Have any programs at the CDC been eliminated or left with zero staff? If so, please list them.
4. What factors, if any, were considered when laying off probationary employees at CDC in February?
5. How is the administration determining which employees to reinstate?
6. What process does the administration have in place to examine any consequences of firing employees?
7. How have these firings affected public health preparedness activities, including the CDC's ability to respond to the avian flu and measles outbreaks?
8. Does the administration plan to eliminate any additional positions at the CDC? If so, which employees will be terminated?
9. How many CDC employees received an email offering a \$25,000 payment in return for leaving their job?⁹ At the time of responding to this letter, how many CDC employees accepted the offer? Please list the CDC programs that were affected by this offer.
10. How will the revised Office of Personnel Management (OPM) memo affect the probationary employees that were fired in February and not reinstated as of March 4, 2025?¹⁰
11. How will drastic cuts to the CDC impact future public health workforce challenges and how would you address these challenges?

⁸ J. Mac McCullough, "The Return on Investment of Public Health System Spending," *AcademyHealth*, (Jun. 2018), https://academyhealth.org/sites/default/files/roi_public_health_spending_june2018.pdf

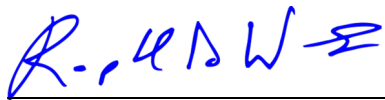
⁹ Amanda Seitz, Top US health agency makes \$25,000 buyout offer to most of its employees, *The Associated Press*, (Mar. 9, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/hhs-employee-buyouts-kennedy-cdc-nih-medicaid-bf5a746518b2b3fe967ab95a8e2a1a65>

¹⁰ Guidance on Probationary Periods, Administration Leave and Details, Chief Human Capital Officers Council, <https://chcoc.gov/content/guidance-probationary-periods-administrative-leave-and-details>

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

We respectfully urge your immediate consideration and response to these questions by April 4, 2025. Additionally, we urge you to re-evaluate the Administration's indiscriminate and brash process for reducing government waste. The safety of millions of Americans depends on it.

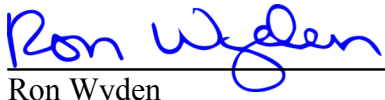
Sincerely,



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



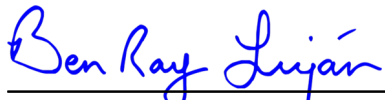
Jon Ossoff
United States Senator



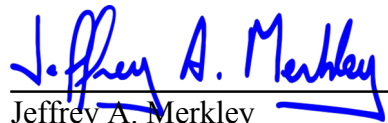
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Angela Alsobrooks
United States Senator