

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 20, 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 with outrage at the Department of Health and Human Services' (the "Department") illegal reductions in force (RIF) of approximately 1,000 employees carried out during the government shutdown. A government shutdown does not compel the Department to fire workers, nor does it provide any additional authority to do so. The Department is *choosing* to do this, further putting Americans' health and well-being at risk, in clear violation of the Anti-Deficiency Act and the Administrative Procedure Act, among other federal laws.

Punitive and reckless actions like these latest firings demonstrate how President Trump and Office of Management and Budget Director Russell Vought are relishing the government shutdown they created to play politics with Americans' health and well-being. Despite what the President claims about going after "Democratic programs", HHS programs touch the lives of nearly every American. Firing employees responsible for administering substance use and mental health programs and programs protecting against emerging and infectious diseases, as well as chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats, hurts and endangers all Americans in every state, in communities across the country.

This is just the latest in a pattern of reckless, vindictive, and poorly planned actions that the Department has undertaken in secret. The Department has yet to justify the RIFs and other staff reductions it implemented earlier this year when the Department fired and forced out 20,000 HHS employees. We are deeply concerned these latest RIFs, on top of other actions taken by the Department, will further negatively impact the ability of HHS to provide critical services to the American people and carry out its statutory responsibilities, including the timely awarding of funding provided in annual appropriations acts. Last fiscal year, HHS impounded billions of dollars, including funding for lifesaving cancer research and comprehensive early childhood care and education, and created completely unnecessary and burdensome delays for grant recipients and service providers across the country.

This latest round of RIFs was so poorly executed that the Department acknowledged it made mistakes and has already rescinded hundreds of RIF notices it sent to employees on October 10th. In some instances, employees learned that they were fired not through official notices but through an inability to use their credentials to log into their agency accounts. Continuing to fire employees who administer and oversee critical HHS programs in every state does not make the government more efficient—it will only lead to more funding delays this year, less effective use

of taxpayer dollars, and more risk of fraud and abuse. This leaves the United States less prepared in the face of a public health emergency and puts the health and well-being of every American at risk.

The most recent round of RIFs within the Department was particularly reckless with regard to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Within CDC, approximately 1,300 employees received RIF notices across dozens of programs charged with keeping Americans safe, including experts in disease surveillance, infectious diseases like measles, and nearly all the editors of the agency's flagship publication, its Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Yet in a clear sign of the haphazard nature in which HHS is implementing such significant changes, approximately 700 of the 1,300 CDC employees who received RIF notices were reinstated the next day. This follows the pattern of earlier staff reductions where HHS has fired employees only to later reinstate them. The nearly 600 CDC employees that remain fired by the latest RIFs include data scientists and health statisticians, chronic disease experts, and communications personnel who keep states and the public informed about critical health information. These RIFs are the latest example of an administration that continues to attack public health programs in an effort to silence career scientists, which will put American lives at risk.

Despite the administration's supposed priority to address the fentanyl crisis, it chose to fire more than 100 people from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, gutting the agency responsible for addressing our nation's mental health care and substance use crises to half the size it was at the beginning of the year. These cuts decimated the Division of Children and School Mental Health, leaving no staff to improve youth mental health outcomes, and included staff from the Mental Health Promotion Branch, State and Consumer Protection Branch, and the Division of Primary Prevention. These firings undermine our recent progress in reducing the number of drug overdose deaths and will negatively impact our ability to address the mental health crisis.

Similarly, the administration has seemingly forgotten its purported commitment to the health of women and families as they have pursued layoffs that will worsen the existing maternal health crisis and make it harder for women to access cancer screenings. In this latest round of RIFs, the administration chose to decimate the division of Healthy Start at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), a critical program focused on preventing maternal deaths and reducing infant mortality. These staff supported grantees around the country who trained and certified doulas, screened women for depression and intimate partner violence, and provided mental health and public benefit referrals and support, all of which lowered the infant mortality rate. Additionally, the administration fired the HRSA staff tasked with operating the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) for Children program which prevents pediatric deaths by ensuring our emergency medicine providers and departments are equipped to care for infants and children facing medical emergencies, including in rural communities. They are further decimating our health care workforce's ability to care for the American people by firing staff that run nursing workforce development programs and help train new nurses to practice in underserved communities. They also fired 55 people working in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for

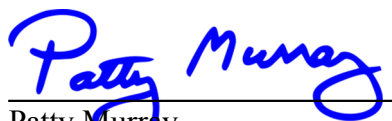
Health (OASH), including all staff working to oversee the Title X family planning program, which last year provided cancer screenings, STI testing, and contraceptives for almost four million people.

The administration also fired more than 40 employees from the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR), including from its center for preparedness, cybersecurity, and information management offices. ASPR leads the nation's medical and public health preparedness for, response to, and recovery from disasters and public health emergencies. ASPR's Preparedness and Emergency Operations program leads the Department's preparedness, support, and coordination functions. When disaster strikes a community and the response and recovery needs exceed a state or local jurisdiction's capabilities, ASPR deploys medical teams, provides medical supplies and services, and coordinates emergency medical care as needed. These latest firings put our nation's health preparedness at risk, by effectively eliminating entire programs that identify health incidents, determine response needs, and coordinate Federal health care surge operations before, during, and after a public health emergency or disaster.

Within the Administration for Children and Families, nearly 50 employees received RIF notices who are responsible for reducing poverty, supporting families and vulnerable youth, and evaluating the effectiveness of these programs. These cuts reportedly include staff within the Office of Community Services that provide assistance and support to states to reduce poverty, provide housing and energy assistance, and provide emergency assistance for at-risk Americans. The administration also reduced staff in the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation that ensure federal funds are being used effectively to improve access to child care, reduce poverty, and improve employment outcomes. Further, RIF notices reportedly included all employees responsible for the Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five program in the Office of Early Childhood Development, which will further undermine states' early childhood education and child care systems. These reductions show the administration is unconcerned with finding the most effective programs to move children, individuals and families out of poverty.

The reckless and harmful actions the Department and this administration have taken over the last several months undermines the critical role HHS plays in ensuring the health and well-being of all Americans. Unfortunately, this latest action to fire employees during a government shutdown clearly demonstrates how this administration has no interest in a funded, functional government and prefers a shutdown rather than working on solutions to problems facing American families, including addressing the impending rise in health care costs for millions of Americans.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Senate Committee on
Appropriations



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions



Tammy Baldwin
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and
Related Agencies



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



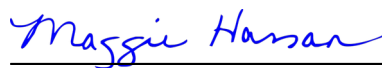
Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator



Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



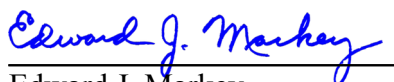
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



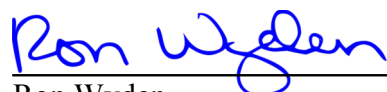
Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Finance



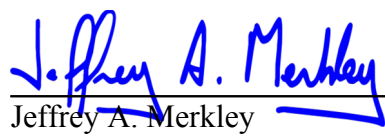
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



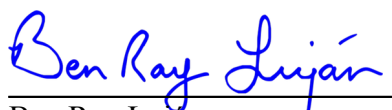
Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



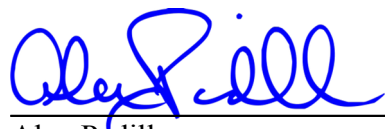
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



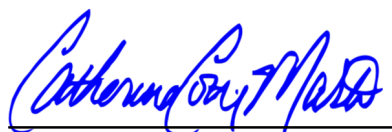
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



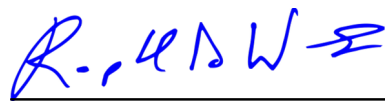
Peter Welch
United States Senator



Ruben Gallego
United States Senator



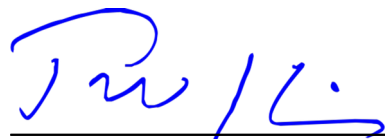
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



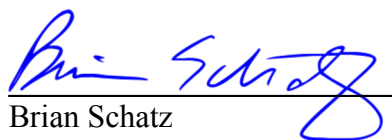
Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator