

The Honorable Bill Cassidy

Chair

Committee on Health, Education, Labor and

Pensions

U.S. Senate

Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders

Ranking Member

Committee on Health, Education, Labor and

**Pensions** 

U.S. Senate

Washington, DC 20510

May 12, 2025

Dear Chair Cassidy and Ranking Member Sanders,

We write to you in response to the news that tens of thousands of federal employees of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) were laid off on April 1, 2025. We appreciate your inviting Secretary Kennedy to participate in a hearing on these drastic actions and the proposed reorganization of HHS. We are also looking forward to the opportunity for the committee to hear from Secretary Kennedy about the HHS FY26 budget on May 14. We are writing to urge you and your committee members to include questions about the impacts of the layoffs on environmental health programs at CDC in this hearing.

As reported by multiple news sources, staff were laid off across the Division of Environmental Health Science and Practice within the National Center for Environmental Health. Specific programs that are now without staff supporting them include the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, the National Asthma Control Program, the Environmental Public Health Tracking Network, and other key programs that protect public and environmental health. Subsequently, news reports of statements by Secretary Kennedy indicated that some programs may be reinstated, including the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program; however, HHS has also stated that the personnel are *not* being reinstated. We need clear answers on the status and future of these essential programs and the services they provide to the American people.

Every year in the U.S., tens of thousands of people die from preventable environmental hazards like radon and carbon monoxide, hundreds of thousands of children are exposed to lead, and millions of people have asthma. Every state in the country, as well as DC, Puerto Rico, Guam, and several localities, receives funding from at least one of the programs within NCEH. For example:



- Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program: 48 states, DC, and Puerto Rico currently receive grants from this program to identify and provide support services to children who have elevated blood lead levels.
- Environmental Public Health Tracking Network: 32 states and one county currently receive grants from this program to build, operate, and maintain tracking programs and data portals and networks for environmental health.
- National Asthma Control Program: 27 states, DC, and Puerto Rico currently receive grants from this program to conduct and analyze asthma data and address indoor and outdoor asthma triggers.

These programs help our communities keep our air, water, food, homes, schools, and environments clean, prevent our children from being poisoned, provide valuable public health data, and respond to extreme weather and natural disasters. These programs are cost-effective, returning benefits to society worth many times what we spend on them, and they are vital to keeping us all safe in our homes and communities. And the CDC staff who support these programs provide valuable technical assistance, support, and guidance to the states and localities that rely on this funding to protect the health of their residents.

At the hearing, we request that you direct questions to Secretary Kennedy that will provide more information about the future of these programs, such as:

- On April 3, you stated that the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program will be reinstated. Subsequently, your department said the personnel for the program are not being reinstated. Can you clarify the discrepancy between these comments and confirm whether (and if so, how) the program will be reinstated and whether CDC will be able to continue to perform its essential functions, including surveillance of blood lead levels, management of grants, support for state and local programs, and guidance for clinical assessment and management of lead poisoning?
- Please clarify the status of the other programs under the National Center for Environmental Health, including the National Asthma Control Program and the Environmental Public Health Tracking Network. If these programs are not reinstated, who will be responsible for conducting the important data surveillance and tracking functions of these programs? Can you confirm that existing grants to states and localities under these programs will not be impacted?
- CDC's environmental health programs provide vital public health infrastructure, and cutting them threatens to undermine every other agency and state and local



government trying to address issues like lead and asthma and protect their residents. Cutting these programs also jeopardizes CDC's ability to conduct surveillance on important environmental health issues and means that the federal government will be flying blind going into the next environmental health crisis. Is the National Center for Environmental Health and the programs operating under it proposed to be moved to a new agency under your proposed HHS restructuring, and if so, what are you doing to ensure a smooth transition of services?

 How does eliminating the National Asthma Control Program and other services provided by CDC's environmental health teams fit with your stated goals to "Make America Healthy Again" by addressing chronic diseases, including childhood asthma?

Thank you for your support of environmental health programs and your inquiry into the future of these critical activities at CDC. Please contact Sarah Goodwin at <a href="mailto:sarah@nshhcoalition.org">sarah@nshhcoalition.org</a> with further questions about the programs and questions outlined here. We can also provide more information about the impact of CDC environmental health programs in specific states upon request.

The National Safe and Healthy Housing Coalition is a broad coalition of over 400 organizations working to improve housing conditions nationwide. The coalition and our allies promote policies for safe and healthy housing in the United States, with special emphasis on those who are disproportionately impacted. These vital programs must be allowed to operate, as they have been congressionally funded, to support healthy housing for all.

## **Organizational Signatures**

| Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics | Alabama    |
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| Alaska Community Action on Toxics                     | Alaska     |
| Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics | Arizona    |
| Rebuilding Together the Valley of the Sun             | Arizona    |
| Barr & Clark, Inc.                                    | California |
| Center for Environmental Health                       | California |
| Children Now  | California |
| Filling The Gap Healthy Homes Services                | California |
| Non Toxic Communities                                 | California |
| Occupational Knowledge International                  | California |
| Rebuilding Together Peninsula                         | California |
| Regional Asthma Management and Prevention             | California |



| Sierra Service Project Smokefree Air For Everyone (SAFE) California Smokefree Air For Everyone (SAFE) Colorado GTO Environmental Connecticut Ledge Light Health District Connecticut Lead-Free Delaware American Academy of Pediatrics District of Columbia DC Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics District of Columbia American Lung Association Autistic Self Advocacy Network District of Columbia Clan Water Action Coalition on Human Needs District of Columbia Coalition on Human Needs District of Columbia Lincoln Westmoreland Housing District of Columbia District of Columbia Coalition on Social Responsibility District of Columbia Trust for America's Health District of Columbia Florida Florida Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics, Inc. Florida Physicians for Social Responsibility Florida Rebuilding Together North Central Florida BLKHLTH Georgia BL |  |                      |
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| Railsas  | BEC Environmental Group                                  | Kansas               |
| ·  | Kentucky Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics   | Kentucky             |
|  | Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics      | Maine                |



| Physicians for Social Responsibility Maine                  | Maine          |
|---|----------------|
| Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments                 | Maryland       |
| Green & Healthy Homes Initiative, Inc.                      | Maryland       |
| Indoor Environments Association                             | Maryland       |
| Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics      | Maryland       |
| National Association of School Nurses                       | Maryland       |
| National Center for Healthy Housing                         | Maryland       |
| Unleaded Kids   | Maryland       |
| Boston Public Health Commission                             | Massachusetts  |
| Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility         | Massachusetts  |
| Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics | Massachusetts  |
| Ecology Center  | Michigan       |
| Great Lakes Lead Elimination Network                        | Michigan       |
| Parents for Healthy Homes                                   | Michigan       |
| The National Carbon Monoxide Awareness Association          | Michigan       |
| We Want Green Too   | Michigan       |
| Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics     | Minnesota      |
| Mississippi Communities United for Prosperity               | Mississippi    |
| Rebuilding Together Platte Valley East                      | Nebraska       |
| Rebuilding Together Southern Nevada                         | Nevada         |
| State of New Hampshire Asthma Control Program               | New Hampshire  |
| Access Training Services, Inc.                              | New Jersey     |
| Black Lives Matter Paterson                                 | New Jersey     |
| Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey     | New Jersey     |
| Isles, Inc.   | New Jersey     |
| New Jersey Future   | New Jersey     |
| New Jersey Parent Teacher Association                       | New Jersey     |
| Newark Education Workers Caucus                             | New Jersey     |
| Newark Water Coalition                                      | New Jersey     |
| Healthy Climate New Mexico                                  | New Mexico     |
| Rebuilding Together Sandoval County                         | New Mexico     |
| Tierra del Sol Housing Corporation                          | New Mexico     |
| Chemung County Health Department                            | New York       |
| Coalition for Home Repair                                   | New York       |
| Coalition to Prevent Lead Poisoning                         | New York       |
| Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo                    | New York       |
| QA Lead Environmental Inc.                                  | New York       |
| Uniquely Free 2B Lead Free                                  | New York       |
| North Carolina Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program  | North Carolina |



| Rebuilding Together of Greater Charlotte                           | North Carolina |
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| North Dakota State Association of City and County Health Officials | North Dakota   |
| North Dakota Environmental Health Association                      | North Dakota   |
| Rebuilding Together of Fargo-Moorhead Area, Inc.                   | North Dakota   |
| Collective Citizens Organized Against Lead (CCOAL)                 | Ohio           |
| Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics                 | Ohio           |
| Ohio Lead Free Kids Coalition                                      | Ohio           |
| Oklahoma Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics             | Oklahoma       |
| Children First   | Pennsylvania   |
| Healthy Start, Inc.  | Pennsylvania   |
| Lead-Free Promise Project  | Pennsylvania   |
| Pittsburgh United  | Pennsylvania   |
| Servants, Inc.   | Pennsylvania   |
| Take Action Advocacy Group   | Pennsylvania   |
| The National Nurse-Led Care Consortium                             | Pennsylvania   |
| Women for a Healthy Environment                                    | Pennsylvania   |
| Childhood Lead Action Project                                      | Rhode Island   |
| Young, Gifted & Green  | Tennessee      |
| Physicians for Social Responsibility Texas                         | Texas          |
| Rebuilding Together Houston  | Texas          |
| Lead and Environmental Hazards Association                         | Vermont        |
| Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America                           | Virginia       |
| Healthy Babies Bright Futures                                      | Virginia       |
| Society for Public Health Education                                | Virginia       |
| Partnership for Air Matters  | Washington     |
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