

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

Majority (202) 225-3641
Minority (202) 225-2927

November 18, 2025

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

The Honorable Jayanta Bhattacharya, M.D., Ph.D.
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Secretary Kennedy and Director Bhattacharya:

We wrote to you on June 10, 2025, after hundreds of National Institutes of Health (NIH) staff signed and published The Bethesda Declaration, which described instances of waste, abuse, and illegal actions at NIH.¹ In our letter, we reminded you that individuals like the signers of the Bethesda Declaration were protected from retaliation and sought your written assurances that you would follow the law and not retaliate. Despite our simple request that you acknowledge your employees' rights under federal law, you failed to respond.

Last Thursday, you further demonstrated your disregard for our request, federal law, and the Constitution by placing Dr. Jenna Norton, an NIH employee and leader of the Bethesda Declaration, on administrative leave. While the communication placing Dr. Norton on administrative leave stated that it was "not being done for any disciplinary purpose," a Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) official hiding behind anonymity told *The New York Times* that Dr. Norton was "a radical leftist" who was placed on leave for criticizing the Administration.²

¹ Letter from Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., Ranking Member, House Committee on Energy and Commerce; Rep. Diana DeGette, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Health; Rep. Yvette D. Clarke, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, to Hon. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Hon. Jayanta Bhattacharya, M.D., Ph.D., Director, National Institutes of Health (June 10, 2025).

² *N.I.H. Worker Who Criticized Trump Health Policies Says She Is on Administrative Leave*, The New York Times (Nov. 13, 2025).

Your illegal actions violate the protections afforded to Dr. Norton under both the Whistleblower Protection Act and the First Amendment to the Constitution. Additionally, any efforts to pretend that Dr. Norton has not been placed on administrative leave for a “disciplinary purpose” are completely unconvincing, particularly given the statement by the unnamed HHS staffer.

Fortunately, your actions have failed to silence an important voice from continuing to raise the alarm about harms to public health and your dismantling of America’s prized biomedical research enterprise. Dr. Norton has continued to speak out in protest of your actions at NIH and your attempts to discourage others from disclosing critical information about the damage you are doing.³

Your actions trigger certain rights and obligations under the Administrative Leave Reform Act and conforming regulations, including the keeping of certain records and reporting requirements to Congress should Dr. Norton’s leave continue for a certain period of time.⁴ Dr. Norton will also be entitled to detailed information regarding her status and your rationale for her being placed on leave.⁵ We are watching closely and will be counting the days that Dr. Norton remains on what is clearly investigative leave. In addition, we will be demanding at regular intervals every record and report to which we are entitled by law as a committee of jurisdiction.

³ See Jenna Norton (@jenna-m-norton.bsky.social), BlueSky (Nov. 13, 2025 at 9:37 PM) (<https://bsky.app/profile/jenna-m-norton.bsky.social/post/3m5knjtbqrc2d>).

⁴ See 5 U.S.C. 6329b(d)(1), (f); CFR § 630.1504.

⁵ See 5 U.S.C. 6329b(b)(4).

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To assist with our oversight of your actions, we request a briefing within the next week regarding the basis for your placement of Dr. Norton on administrative leave, as well as all records that you are required to maintain by law and provide to Congress upon request.⁶ Please contact Democratic Committee staff at (202) 225-2927 immediately to schedule a briefing.

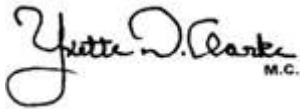
Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member



Diana DeGette
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health



Yvette D. Clarke
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and
Investigations

cc: The Honorable Brett Guthrie
Chairman

The Honorable H. Morgan Griffith
Chairman
Subcommittee on Health

The Honorable John Joyce
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

⁶ See 5 U.S.C. 6329b(f).