

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

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

March 13, 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 Thomas Engels
Administrator
Health Resources and Services Administration
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Secretary Kennedy and Administrator Engels:

We are writing to express our strong opposition to the recent indiscriminate and unauthorized termination of workers at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and to request additional information regarding these terminations and their impact on the agency. Tens of millions of Americans receive quality, affordable health care and other services through the programs HRSA administers, and adequate staffing is paramount to being able to continue to deliver care to vulnerable communities across the nation. We request answers to our questions to understand the nature and scope of these terminations, which have been conducted without any public disclosure, your authority to undertake these terminations, and whether you have undertaken any analysis of the impact of these terminations on the programs that HRSA administers.

HRSA's staff support and manage its 90-plus programs and more than 3,000 grantees. These programs deliver health services to people who are geographically isolated, economically or medically vulnerable, people with HIV, pregnant women, mothers and their families, those with low incomes, residents of rural areas, American Indians and Alaska Natives, and many others. HRSA programs support health infrastructure, including the training of health professionals in areas where they are needed most and the advancement of telehealth. HRSA also oversees programs that provide discounts on prescription drugs to safety net providers, facilitate organ, bone marrow, and cord blood transplantation, and compensate individuals

injured by vaccination.

HRSA's Health Center Program provides access to affordable, comprehensive, and high-quality primary health care services to patients, regardless of their ability to pay. In 2023, health centers served 32.5 million patients, and nearly 1,500 grantees and look-alikes provided care at 16,000 sites across the country.¹ In the past month, the Trump Administration's funding freezes have jeopardized health centers' ability to keep their doors open. In Virginia, over half of the health centers were cut off from federal grant money, forcing some to limit services and others to close.² Others reported trouble accessing needed funds, even after a federal judge ordered funding to resume. The stability of health centers is already fragile, with almost half of the health centers in the country having negative financial margins in 2023,³ and terminating staff at the agency responsible for dispensing federal dollars to health centers will only make it more difficult for them to keep their doors open.

Over the past two years, HRSA has taken historic steps as part of its Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN) Modernization Initiative and its implementation of the Securing the U.S. OPTN Act signed into law by President Biden. This includes creating an independent OPTN Board of Directors, transitioning from a single vendor to multiple vendors to support OPTN operations, and issuing new contracts to support modernization, all while ensuring the continuity of OPTN operations. Given this hugely important work, we are troubled to learn that a significant number of employees at HRSA's Division of Transplantation who have been working on modernizing the organ transplant system have been terminated. Mass layoffs are in direct opposition to the goals of the OPTN Modernization Initiative, and these layoffs will have a negative impact on the more than 100,000 Americans who are waiting for lifesaving organ transplants.⁴

HRSA also administers many different workforce programs, including the National Health Service Corps, Nurse Corps, and many others, that connect skilled health care providers to communities in need. Last year, more than 22,000 health professionals in HRSA loan and scholarship programs cared for over 23 million patients, and two-thirds of HRSA training sites supported medically underserved communities.⁵ These programs are particularly important as we see continuing provider shortages across the country. The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis projects nationwide health care providers shortages in 2037, including 207,980 registered nurses, 187,130 physicians, and over 400,000 behavioral health providers.

¹ National Association of Community Health Centers, *America's Health Centers: By the Numbers* (Oct. 2024) (<https://www.nachc.org/resource/americas-health-centers-by-the-numbers/>).

² VPM, *Virginia community health centers close over federal funding access* (Feb. 2025) (<https://www.vpm.org/news/2025-02-04/virginia-community-health-centers-close-federal-funding-grant-access>).

³ George Washington University Milken Institute of Public Health, 72. *Community Health Centers Grew Through 2023, But Serious Hazards Are on the Horizon* (Sept. 2024) (<https://geigergibson.publichealth.gwu.edu/72-community-health-centers-grew-through-2023-serious-hazards-are-horizon>).

⁴ Health Resources & Services Administration, *Organ Donation Statistics* (<https://www.organdonor.gov/learn/organ-donation-statistics>) (accessed Mar. 13, 2025).

⁵ Health Resources & Services Administration, *Bureau of Health Workforce* (<https://bhw.hrsa.gov/>) (accessed Mar. 13, 2025).

The mass termination of HRSA staff, who are crucial in supporting its many workforce programs, will jeopardize not only the health workforce but the entire American people who need care.

Given the enormous consequences that sweeping layoffs at HRSA will have on our nation's health workforce and access to care, we request detailed responses to the following questions no later than March 27, 2025. Where relevant, your response should include any and all memoranda, directives, or orders meant to effectuate these recent terminations.

1. What is the total number of probationary and non-probationary employees terminated from HRSA since Thursday, February 13, 2025? Specify the number of terminated workers, in both classifications, from each bureau, division, and office.
2. Are there additional layoffs planned for HRSA employees at this time, including those directed by the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of Personnel Management in the February 26, 2025, memorandum?⁶
 - a. Please provide copies of any memoranda or documents detailing any proposed Reductions in Force at HHS or any of its operating divisions, including HRSA. Please provide a response in writing on how these plans were drafted, as well as the names of individuals involved in drafting these plans, both within the agency or outside of it.
 - b. If further resignation or termination requests are ordered, how many additional layoffs are expected? Specify the total number of layoffs by bureau, division, and office.
3. What role did DOGE have in identifying or prioritizing employees for termination? What metrics did they use?
4. How many of the positions that are now vacant will be permanently eliminated, and how many positions will be filled by new personnel? Specify each total by bureau, division, and office.
5. What meetings have been paused, suspended, or altered at HRSA because of the recent terminations, beginning February 13, 2025?
6. What will the impact of the mass layoffs be on the Health Center Program and its ability to continue supporting health centers across the country?
7. Given the employees you have terminated in the Division of Transplantation, how do you plan to continue the OPTN Modernization Initiative without impacting the

⁶ U.S. Office of Management and Budget and U.S. Office of Personnel Management, *Guidance on Agency RIF and Reorganization Plans Requested by Implementing The President's "Department of Government Efficiency" Workforce Optimization Initiative* (Feb. 26, 2025).

thousands of Americans who are waiting for a lifesaving organ transplant?

8. What will the impact of the mass layoffs be on the Bureau of Health Workforce and the many workforce programs it administers? Do you anticipate a reduction in these programs?
9. How many employees were terminated that work on the Teaching Health Center Program, including its Planning and Development program? Will there be any reduction in the number of centers and/or residents supported by the program?
10. Under 5 C.F.R. 315.803(a), prohibitory employees can be terminated “if the employee fails to demonstrate fully his or her qualifications for continued employment.” Please document the criteria that the Department reviewed to assess employee qualifications in accordance with this provision.
11. Under 5 CFR 315.803(b), prohibitory employees who are terminated must notify in writing as to the “inadequacies of [their] performance of conduct.” Please provide copies of each letter documenting the inadequacies in each terminated employee’s performance since the beginning of the prohibitory period. If multiple employees were identified as having the same performance inadequacy, a template letter will suffice so long as the Department identifies how many staff received the same letter.
12. Federal law prohibits the partisan dismissal of prohibitory employees, and the federal circuit has identified a right to appeal termination decisions when the action was a result of partisan politics.^{7,8} President Trump has called his efforts to purge career workers in the government “retribution” and disparaged them for undermining his power.^{9,10} Given this:
 - a. What process has HHS put in place to process appeals?
 - b. How many appeals have been filed since the terminations began?
 - c. How many terminations have been reversed and how many have been sustained?

⁷ 5 CFR 315.806(b). *See Stokes v. Aff*, 761 F.2d 682 (prohibitory staff can appeal decisions when the action was a result of partisan politics.)

⁸ Letter from Mike Zamore, National Director of Policy and Government Affairs; Kia Hamadanchy, Senior Policy Counsel; Monica Hopkins, Executive Director of the ACLU of the District of Columbia, American Civil Liberties Union, to Senator Rand Paul, Chairman, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee; Senator Gary Peters, Ranking Member, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee; Rep. James Comer, Chairman, House Committee on Oversight and Accountability; Rep. Gerald E. Connolly, Ranking Member, House Committee on Oversight and Accountability (Feb. 7, 2025).

⁹ C-SPAN, *Former Pres. Trump: “I Am Your Justice...I Am Your Retribution”* (Mar. 4, 2023) (<https://www.c-span.org/clip/campaign-2024/former-pres-trump-i-am-your-justicei-am-your-retribution/5060238>).

¹⁰ Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, *Trump has said he wants to destroy the “deep state” 56 times on Truth Social* (Aug. 1, 2024) (<https://www.citizensforethics.org/reports-investigations/crew-investigations/trump-has-said-he-wants-to-destroy-the-deep-state-56-times-on-truth-social/>)

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13. Provide a full accounting of all HRSA Reports to Congress due in 2025 and HRSA's plans for ensuring that these congressionally mandated reports are completed and submitted on time.

We urge you to reverse these mass firings and protect the vital work that HRSA is doing to provide quality, affordable health care to patients across the country. As the Secretary of HHS and Administrator of HRSA, these actions and their impending impacts are your responsibility, and you have a duty to the American people to ensure that our health agencies are serving their purpose. We expect to see immediate steps to restore the workforce that delivers on HRSA's mission.

Sincerely,



Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce



Rep. Diana DeGette
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Health
Committee on Energy and Commerce