

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

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We are writing to express our strong opposition to the recent indiscriminate and unauthorized termination of workers at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and to request additional information regarding these terminations and their impact on the agency. Millions of Americans receive mental health and substance use services through programs administered by SAMHSA, 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 SAMHSA administers.

SAMHSA's staff support and manage programs that prevent substance use and overdose, enhance access to suicide prevention and mental health services, promote resilience and emotional health for children, youth, and families, integrate behavioral and physical health care, and strengthen the behavioral health workforce. Through these programs, SAMHSA helps to ensure people affected by mental health and substance use conditions receive care in order to live healthy and productive lives.

Two of SAMHSA's largest programs are the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (MHBG) and the Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Services Block Grant (SUPTRS BG). Since 1992, the MHBG has distributed funds to 59 states and territories that can be used for a variety of behavioral health services, including outpatient treatment for patients with serious mental illnesses, rehabilitation services, crisis stabilization and case management, jail diversion programs, and wraparound services for children and families, among others. The MHBG is a significant safety net source of funding for mental health services for some of the most at-risk populations across the country. The SUPTRS BG funds states and

territories efforts to plan, implement, and evaluate substance use disorder prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery support services. This program aims to ensure that individuals and communities have access to a range of substance use-related prevention, treatment, and recovery support services necessary to improve health and reduce the impact of substance use on communities across the country. SAMHSA staff play a pivotal role in administering these programs, and state programs will be negatively impacted if there are not adequate staff for the program.

SAMHSA also funds the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. In 2020, Congress designated the new 988 dialing code to be operated through the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This program operates over 200 local crisis centers that offer 24/7, free, confidential access to trained crisis counselors who can help people experiencing mental health-related distress.¹ This service is vitally important, as suicide was the second-leading cause of death for people aged 10-14 and 25-34 years old and 1.6 million American adults attempted suicide in 2022.² Again, SAMHSA staff are critically important for the continuation of lifesaving programs such as the 988 Lifeline. Mass layoffs endanger not only the program but the many Americans who rely on access to lifesaving care.

These programs make up a fraction of the universe of programs and services that SAMHSA supports. All of SAMHSA's programs exist in the context of a rising mental health and substance use crisis in the United States. An estimated 48.5 million Americans battled a substance use disorder in the past year,³ and 57.8 million Americans experienced mental illness.⁴ Many of these Americans struggle to access appropriate care. Now more than ever, SAMHSA programs are integral to the health and well-being of the American population.

Given the enormous consequences that sweeping layoffs at SAMHSA will have on our nation's access to behavioral health services, 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 SAMHSA since Thursday, February 13, 2025? Specify the number of terminated workers, in both classifications, from each office and center.
2. Are there additional layoffs planned for SAMHSA employees at this time, including those directed by the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *988 Key Messages* (Oct. 2023) (<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/988/key-messages>).

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Suicide Data and Statistics* (<https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/data.html>) (accessed Mar. 13, 2025).

³ American Addiction Centers, *Alcohol and Drug Abuse Statistics (Facts About Addiction)* (Dec. 31, 2024) (<https://americanaddictioncenters.org/rehab-guide/addiction-statistics-demographics>).

⁴ *Ibid.*

Personnel Management in the February 26, 2025, memorandum?⁵

- a. Please provide copies of any memoranda or documents detailing any proposed Reductions in Force at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) or any of its operating divisions, including SAMHSA. 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 office and center.
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 office and center.
5. What meetings have been paused, suspended, or altered at SAMHSA because of the recent terminations, beginning February 13, 2025?
6. What will the impact of the mass layoffs be on the MHBG and SUPTRS BG programs and their ability to continue supporting behavioral health services across the country?
7. What will the impact of the mass layoffs be on the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline?
8. Under 5 C.F.R. 315.803(a), prohibitionary 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.
9. Under 5 CFR 315.803(b), prohibitionary 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 prohibitionary 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.

⁵ 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).

10. Federal law prohibits the partisan dismissal of prohibitionary employees, and the federal circuit has identified a right to appeal termination decisions when the action was a result of partisan politics.^{6,7} President Trump has called his efforts to purge career workers in the government “retribution” and disparaged them for undermining his power.^{8,9} 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?

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

⁶ 5 CFR 315.806(b). *See Stokes v. Aff*, 761 F.2d 682 (prohibitionary staff can appeal decisions when the action was a result of partisan politics.) See generally <https://thehill.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/02/ACLU-AaCLU-DC-Potential-Mass-Layoffs-of-Government-Employees.pdf>.

⁷ 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).

⁸ 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>).

⁹ 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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We urge you to reverse these mass firings and protect the vital work that SAMHSA is doing to respond to the substance use and mental health crises. As the Secretary of HHS, 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 SAMHSA's mission.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Frank Pallone, Jr. in blue ink.

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

Handwritten signature of Diana DeGette in blue ink.

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