

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “Are CDC’s Priorities Restoring Public Trust and Improving the Health of the American People?”

July 23, 2024

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is recognized domestically and globally as the leading public health authority.

Today, we will hear from six Center Directors at the CDC on the critical role the agency plays in both domestic and global public health. I thank our witnesses, who are all career public servants, for being here today.

This hearing comes at a time when House Republicans continue their extreme partisan assault on the CDC. It never used to be this way – Democrats and Republicans used to work together to strengthen the CDC so it could confront the public crises of the future.

It’s important to remember that, since its inception, the CDC’s mission has always been focused on improving the everyday lives of all Americans. In 1946, CDC began its work with a primary mission to prevent malaria from spreading across the United States. With a budget of only \$10 million and fewer than 400 employees, the agency built the public health infrastructure to prevent the spread of Malaria.

And that work has continued ever since. During the 1950s it was the complete elimination of Malaria from the United States. In the 60s and 70s, CDC led the way in establishing a national tuberculosis surveillance system and spearheaded rubella vaccinations. The 80s, 90s and 2000s, the CDC established HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaigns, Tobacco cessation programs, the worldwide Polio Eradication Initiative, and identification of the novel H1N1 virus.

Today, the CDC conducts critical science, monitoring, and health guidance to protect our nation against dangerous health threats, including the recent COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing opioid crisis. In FY 2023, CDC processed more than 25,000 grants and cooperative agreements to support state, county, and local public health programs. These programs save lives and federal and state health care dollars. CDC’s work has significant health and economic benefits that work to improve the well-being of the American people and to lower overall health care spending. And these programs are making a difference in all of our districts.

In my state, for instance, the CDC has provided over \$325 million in grant funding for projects ranging from Safe Women/Infant Health at the New Jersey Health Department to critical worker safety programs at Rutgers University.

And yet, House Republicans continue to cave to the extreme elements in their party by proposing massive CDC funding cuts and the total elimination of some programs.

Earlier this month, the House Appropriations Committee passed a partisan fiscal year 2025 Labor, HHS funding bill that includes a \$1.8 billion cut in funding from last year for the CDC. These shortsighted actions threaten the progress we're making to rebuild our nation's public health infrastructure. House Republicans support major cuts to programs that address firearm injuries, opioid overdose prevention, suicide prevention, tobacco prevention, and HIV prevention. Imagine that – last year more than 107,000 Americans died of a drug overdose. This is still a national crisis and yet House Republicans are looking to cut the Opioid Overdose Prevention and Surveillance program by \$506 million below last year's funding levels. To me, that defies logic when we all recognize that this crisis continues. They also threaten boots on the ground programs and local health departments in the communities we all serve.

There's no doubt that we should always be looking for ways to strengthen our federal agencies but unfortunately, House Republicans are continuing their attempts to hamstring CDC's ability to fulfill its mission. They failed to reauthorize the Pandemic All-Hazards Preparedness Act. They repeatedly misled the American people about the efficacy of vaccines. And now they are undermining the CDC with an 18 percent cut in funding.

And if that's bad enough – Republicans are pushing Trump's Project 2025 – a blueprint for a potential second Trump Administration – that proposes eliminating the independence of agencies like CDC. Trump's Project 2025 is a plan to consolidate power in the White House and gut check and balances to the harm of the American people. Trump's Project 2025 would undermine public health preparedness and leave us vulnerable and unprepared for future public health emergencies. It's a way for the extreme right to take control of Americans' lives and freedoms.

This is not the path we should be taking – we should be looking to strengthen the CDC for the future, not weaken it. A robust investment in the CDC and its diverse array of programming is vital to America's health, well-being, and our leadership position around the world.

I look forward to the testimony today and I yield back the balance of my time.