

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-6051
<https://oversight.house.gov>

January 23, 2026

The Honorable Lee Zeldin
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Zeldin:

We write to express concern about recent actions by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to weaken enforcement against polluters, threatening the health of millions of Americans. Since January 20, 2025, the Trump Administration has consistently undermined EPA's mission to protect human health and the environment by rolling back critical regulations, exempting polluters from compliance, and pushing out employees.¹

On February 26, 2025, this Committee wrote to you expressing concerns that EPA was ceasing enforcement of environmental protection laws and forcing out nonpartisan staff.² These concerns have proven prescient. Within the first eight months of 2025, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) initiated only nine significant civil cases against polluters on behalf of EPA. This is a significant decrease from the 46 civil lawsuits that DOJ initiated on behalf of EPA in the first eight months of the Biden Administration and from the 53 cases in the same period during President Trump's first term.³

This decrease in enforcement cases has occurred at the same time that the Trump Administration has conducted large-scale staffing reductions at EPA. For example, since January

¹ *Trump EPA Launches Assault on Environmental Regs*, E&E News (Mar. 12, 2025) (online at www.eenews.net/articles/trump-epa-launches-assault-on-environmental-regs); *Trump Exempts More Than 100 Polluters from Environmental Standards*, The Hill (July 18, 2025) (online at <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/5408714-trump-epa-polluters-environmental-standards-clean-air-act>); *EPA Staffing is Falling. Trump Wants to Keep Cutting*, E&E News (Oct. 22, 2025) (online at www.eenews.net/articles/epa-staffing-is-falling-trump-wants-to-keep-cutting).

² Letter from Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, and Ranking Member Maxwell Frost, Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Energy Policy, and Regulatory Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, to Administrator Lee Zeldin, Environmental Protection Agency (Feb. 26, 2025) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/imo/media/doc/2025-02-26-gec-to-epa-administrator-zeldin-re-epa-changes.pdf>).

³ *How Trump Officials Have Transformed the EPA to Weaken Enforcement*, Washington Post (Nov. 7, 2025) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/11/07/epa-environment-enforcement-deregulation).

20, 2025, the air enforcement group in EPA Region 5—which includes six states and large metropolitan areas like Chicago, Minneapolis, and Detroit—was reported to have lost one-third of the staff tasked with enforcing the Clean Air Act.⁴ At the same time, Region 5 took fewer enforcement actions in 2025 than in any of the previous five years.⁵ We are seriously concerned that fewer air enforcement actions will expose communities in the Great Lakes region to more pollution, contributing to asthma and other respiratory diseases, heart failure, and premature deaths. Region 5’s legal office has also lost more than 30 attorneys this year, making it more difficult to bring these critical enforcement actions.⁶ Region 5 is now operating at its lowest staffing levels since the Reagan Administration,⁷ despite growing challenges from emerging contaminants, such as PFAS and microplastics, that threaten the health of our constituents.

Recent reporting also raises significant concerns about EPA’s ongoing restructuring in Illinois. According to a union representative, the agency is reorganizing staff in its Chicago headquarters by relinquishing the 9th and 10th floors of the Ralph H. Metcalfe Federal Building, forcing “unrelated offices and divisions” into consolidated workspaces.⁸ These changes, coupled with the exodus of employees through early retirements and layoffs, could further strain Region 5’s capacity.

These staffing disruptions and the reduction in EPA enforcement activity are especially concerning for communities like Chicago, where pollution-related illnesses are already far above the national average.⁹ The city records some of the highest asthma rates in the country, with approximately 16% of children suffering from the disease,¹⁰ and neighborhoods on the South and West Sides experiencing disproportionate exposure to particulate matter, lead, and industrial

⁴ *Commentary: Trump’s EPA Cuts to Chicago Headquarters Put Us All in Danger*, Crain’s Chicago Business (Aug. 11, 2025) (online at www.chicagobusiness.com/elevate/epa-staff-cuts-endanger-all-chicago-region-opinion).

⁵ See Environmental Protection Agency, *Enforcement Case Search* (online at <https://echo.epa.gov/facilities/enforcement-case-search>) (accessed Jan. 12, 2026).

⁶ *Commentary: Trump’s EPA Cuts to Chicago Headquarters Put Us All in Danger*, Crain’s Chicago Business (Aug. 11, 2025) (online at www.chicagobusiness.com/elevate/epa-staff-cuts-endanger-all-chicago-region-opinion).

⁷ *Federal Workers Protest Firings of Environmental Protection Agency Employees in Chicago*, CBS News (Feb. 18, 2025) (online at www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/federal-workers-protest-firings-environmental-protection-agency-chicago).

⁸ *EPA ‘Rightsizing’ Key Offices in California, Illinois*, E&E News (Dec. 2, 2025) (online at www.eenews.net/articles/epa-rightsizing-key-offices-in-california-illinois).

⁹ See Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago, *Voices of Child Health in Chicago Report* (July 30, 2020) (online at www.luriechildrens.org/globalassets/voices-of-child-health-in-chicago/voices-of-child-health_childhood-asthma-vol2no6_30-july-2020_final.pdf); *Improving Asthma Treatment for Kids on the South Side of Chicago*, UChicago Medicine (Sept. 24, 2018) (online at www.uchicagomedicine.org/forefront/pediatrics-articles/improving-asthma-treatment-for-kids-on-the-south-side-of-chicago).

¹⁰ Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago, *Voices of Child Health in Chicago Report* (July 30, 2020) (online at www.luriechildrens.org/globalassets/voices-of-child-health-in-chicago/voices-of-child-health_childhood-asthma-vol2no6_30-july-2020_final.pdf);

pollutants.¹¹ In fact, a recent study found that nearly 70% of Chicago children under six live in households with detectable levels of lead in their drinking water.¹² Our children and families deserve clean air and safe water, not weakened oversight and diminished enforcement.

Like children, seniors are also particularly vulnerable to the negative health effects of air pollution. For example, almost 200,000 residents of Orange County, Florida, are aged 65 or older, representing the fastest growing age group in the county.¹³ At the same time, air pollution is increasing in Orlando.¹⁴ We are concerned that cuts to EPA staffing and programs will likely jeopardize the availability of future air quality data, which is critical to ensuring citizens are protected from pollutants. In addition, from the St. Johns River in the north to the Everglades in the south, biowaste and fertilizer runoff release PFAS and cause harmful algal blooms,¹⁵ threatening the health and economy of the Sunshine State. With those threats facing Floridians and other states along the Gulf and East Coasts, it is especially important that EPA Region 4 maintain sufficient staffing to perform its enforcement responsibilities and protect the people who live in these regions.

Given the critical work that EPA does to protect the health and safety of Americans and the numerous ways that the Trump Administration is weakening and destroying that work, we request the following information no later than February 6, 2026:

1. A detailed accounting of the employees responsible for air enforcement, water enforcement, and waste, chemical, and cleanup enforcement within each EPA Regional Office as of January 19, 2025, including a list of all relevant offices and the number of employees within each relevant office;
2. A detailed accounting of the employees responsible for air enforcement, water enforcement, and waste, chemical, and cleanup enforcement within each EPA Regional Office as of February 6, 2026, including a list of all relevant offices and the number of employees within each relevant office;

¹¹ See *Identifying Environmental Hazards Within Southwest Chicago*, University of Illinois Chicago (Mar. 8, 2021) (online at <https://publichealth.uic.edu/news-stories/identifying-environmental-hazards-within-southwest-chicago>).

¹² *Study Estimates Nearly 70 Percent of Children Under Six in Chicago May Be Exposed to Lead-Contaminated Tap Water*, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (Mar. 18, 2024) (online at <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2024/study-estimates-nearly-70-percent-of-children-under-six-in-chicago-may-be-exposed-to-lead-contaminated-tap-water>).

¹³ USAFacts, *Our Changing Population: Orange County, Florida* (online at <https://usafacts.org/data/topics/people-society/population-and-demographics/our-changing-population/state/florida/county/orange-county>) (accessed Nov. 20, 2025).

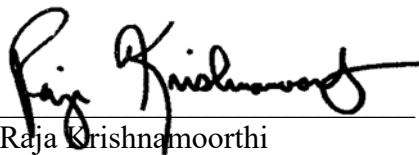
¹⁴ American Lung Association, *Press Release: New Report: Orlando's Air Quality Worsens; Residents Exposed to More Ozone Smog and Daily Particle Pollution* (Apr. 23, 2025) (online at www.lung.org/media/press-releases/sota-orlando-2025).

¹⁵ *Toxic Algae Threat in Florida and the Lake Okeechobee Connection*, FOX 13 News (Aug. 19, 2025) (online at www.fox13news.com/news/toxic-algae-threat-florida-lake-okeechobee-connection); *Toxic Sludge is Tainting Florida's Longest River, with No Solution in Sight*, Florida Phoenix (July 24, 2025) (online at <https://floridaphoenix.com/2025/07/24/toxic-sludge-is-tainting-floridas-longest-river-with-no-solution-in-sight>).

3. A detailed description of the reasons that EPA has initiated significantly fewer civil enforcement cases in 2025 compared to 2024 and 2017;
4. A detailed description of the impact that staffing reductions have had on EPA's ability to bring civil enforcement actions and hold polluters accountable;
5. A detailed description of all factors EPA considered in decreasing EPA enforcement staff in 2025, including staff responsible for inspections, settlements, and pollution monitoring;
6. A detailed description of how EPA prioritizes which civil enforcement actions to bring in regions where staff reductions have been especially severe and pollution burdens disproportionately impact low-income and minority communities;
7. A detailed accounting of EPA's plans to restore lost enforcement capacity, replace terminated staff, and uphold its statutory responsibility to enforce environmental laws; and
8. A detailed description of how EPA intends to fulfill its mission to protect human health and the environment without pursuing enforcement actions against polluters.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. If you have any questions about this request, please contact Committee Democratic staff at (202) 225-5051. Thank you for your prompt attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health Care and
Financial Services



Maxwell Frost
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Economic Growth,
Energy Policy, and Regulatory
Affairs

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman

The Honorable Glenn Grothman, Chairman
Subcommittee on Health Care and Financial Services

The Honorable Eric Burlison, Chairman
Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Energy Policy, and Regulatory Affairs