

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

April 8, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We write with concern that the Trump Administration's decision to fire thousands of Food and Drug Administration (FDA) staff will cause rampant outbreaks of foodborne illness and make food products less safe for consumers. Staff reductions like those championed by President Donald Trump and Elon Musk will undermine FDA's ability to ensure the safety of our nation's food supply. We request information pertaining to the Trump Administration's decision to eliminate FDA staff responsible for monitoring the safety of our food supply and preventing foodborne illness.

On March 24, 2025, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced plans to purge 3,500 people from FDA, a 20% cut to the agency's workforce.¹ These cuts follow the "indiscriminate" dismissal of 89 employees from FDA's Human Foods Program, carried out at the direction of President Trump and Elon Musk.² FDA performs critical functions to keep our food safe, including inspection and monitoring of food sources and products to protect consumers from contaminated foods.³ Despite assurances from HHS that the staffing cuts would not slow down food inspection, reports indicate the layoffs includes staff responsible for food safety oversight and facility inspections, which raises serious concerns about the agency's capacity to fulfill its important mission. As essential workers are fired, remaining employees will struggle to fill the gaps.⁴ As mass terminations began to take effect on April 1, 2025, former

¹ *10,000 Federal Health Workers to Be Laid Off*, New York Times (Mar. 27, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/03/27/us/politics/health-department-job-layoffs-rfk-jr.html); *Trump Administration Highlights: Layoffs of 10,000 Government Health Workers Begin*, New York Times (Apr. 1, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/live/2025/04/01/us/trump-news-updates); *F.D.A. Layoffs Could Raise Drug Costs and Erode Food Safety*, New York Times (Apr. 3, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/04/03/health/fda-layoffs-food-and-drug-safety-rfk-jr.html).

² *Fed Workforce Cuts Hit FDA Foods Program*, Axios (Feb. 20, 2025) (online at www.axios.com/2025/02/20/fda-food-division-cuts); *Trump Administration Highlights: Layoffs of 10,000 Government Health Workers Begin*, New York Times (Apr. 1, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/live/2025/04/01/us/trump-news-updates).

³ Food and Drug Administration, *Compliance & Enforcement (Food)* (Apr. 11, 2023) (online at www.fda.gov/food/compliance-enforcement-food).

⁴ *Id.*; *'There Will Be Slowdowns': How RFK's health Department Cuts Will Affect You*, USA Today (Mar. 28, 2025) (online at www.usatoday.com/story/money/2025/03/27/rfk-jr-hhs-cuts-food-safety-cdc-

FDA Commissioner Robert Califf wrote that “[t]he FDA as we’ve known it is finished.”⁵

These dramatic cuts include more than 170 FDA staff from the Office of Inspections and Investigations, despite the fact that food safety programs at FDA have been chronically underfunded for decades.⁶ In 2024, FDA employed only 443 food safety inspectors to inspect every food processing facility in its jurisdiction—far short of the 1,500 inspectors the agency estimates it would need to inspect 36,600 food facilities in the United States and abroad.⁷ Each year, outbreaks of foodborne illnesses sicken approximately 9 million people, hospitalize approximately 56,000 people, and kill approximately 1,300 people.⁸ In recent years, foodborne illness outbreaks have grown increasingly deadly. Just last year, Boar’s Head deli meat contaminated with *listeria* killed 10 people in one outbreak.⁹ The Trump Administration’s purges to FDA’s food safety personnel means that contaminated food will go undetected until it sickens and kills people, and even then the necessary personnel may not be in place to execute a recall in order to stop the threat to the American people.

We are particularly concerned about the threat these cuts pose to the safety oversight of infant formula production. In 2022, the Committee on Oversight and Reform launched an investigation into infant formula manufacturers after two children died from *cronobacter* bacterial infections from contaminated infant formula manufactured by Abbott Nutrition, a company that had been cited numerous times by FDA for failing to maintain safe manufacturing conditions.¹⁰ During the course of this investigation, we saw firsthand the devastating consequences that can occur when the lack of oversight allows food manufacturers to prioritize profit over consumer safety. The *cronobacter* outbreak led to widespread infant formula recalls

fda/82688365007/).

⁵ *Mass Layoffs Are Underway at the Nation’s Public Health Agencies*, AP (Apr. 2, 2025) (online at https://apnews.com/article/health-human-services-layoffs-restructuring-rfk-jr-ec4d7731695e4204970c7eab953b2289?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=4/1/25%20%20Midday:&utm_term=Active%20subscribers%20from%20Memberful%20%28punchbowlnews%29).

⁶ *FDA Planning for Fewer Food and Drug Inspections Due to Layoffs, Officials Say*, CBS (Apr. 3, 2025) (online at www.cbsnews.com/news/fda-food-drug-inspections-layoffs/); *Food Safety Jeopardized by Onslaught of Funding and Staff Cuts*, New York Times (Mar. 19, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/03/19/health/food-safety-trump-fda-cutbacks-deadly-outbreaks.html); *Food Safety Measures Severely Underfunded*, CBS News (Apr. 7, 2025) (online at www.cbsnews.com/news/food-safety-policies-severely-underfunded/).

⁷ *Food Safety Jeopardized by Onslaught of Funding and Staff Cuts*, New York Times (Mar. 19, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/03/19/health/food-safety-trump-fda-cutbacks-deadly-outbreaks.html); *FDA Planning For Fewer Food And Drug Inspections Due To Layoffs, Officials Say*, CBS News (Apr. 3, 2025) (online at www.cbsnews.com/news/fda-food-drug-inspections-layoffs/).

⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Foodborne Illness Source Attribution Estimates – United States, 2022* (Dec. 13, 2024) (online at www.cdc.gov/ifsac/php/data-research/annual-report-2022.html); *Fed Workforce Cuts Hit FDA Foods Program*, Axios (Feb. 20, 2025) (online at www.axios.com/2025/02/20/fda-food-division-cuts).

⁹ *Food Safety Jeopardized by Onslaught of Funding and Staff Cuts*, New York Times (Mar. 19, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/03/19/health/food-safety-trump-fda-cutbacks-deadly-outbreaks.html).

¹⁰ Letter from Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, Committee on Oversight and Reform, to Chris Calamari, President, U.S. and Canada Nutrition, Abbott Nutrition (May 12, 2022) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2022-05-12.CBM%20RK%20to%20Calamari-Abbott%20re%20Infant%20Formula%20Shortage.pdf>); <https://www.fda.gov/media/157073/download>);

and an infant formula shortage that left families struggling to feed their children.¹¹ Following this outbreak, FDA revamped and retooled its Human Foods Program and took steps to reduce toxins in foods consumed by infants and children, in an effort to prioritize inspections and accountability from private industry and to keep Americans safe.¹²

We urge you to halt all further cuts to FDA personnel. FDA workers protect the safety of our food and ensure that companies do not profit from lax oversight at the expense of American consumers. FDA should continue to use every tool in its arsenal to protect our most vulnerable. Cutting food safety personnel when foodborne illnesses are on the rise directly contradicts the agency's mission of protecting public health.¹³

To assist in our investigation, we request that you provide the following documents and information by April 22, 2025.

1. The precise number of employees scheduled for termination as a result of the March 24, 2025 announcement;
2. A detailed description of the criteria HHS and FDA used to determine:
 - a. Which offices are expected to experience layoffs as part of the terminations announced on March 24, 2025;
 - b. Which employees were terminated as part of the mass firing of approximately 3,500 employees on April 1, 2025;
3. Confirmation that no employee has been made subject to the announced terminations in violation of any applicable laws, regulations, policies, or procedures;
4. A full and complete list of every office/division at FDA and the number of employees from that office/division that will be terminated in connection with your March 24, 2025 announcement;

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² The Biden White House, *Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Strengthens Standards to Protect Millions from Exposure to Lead Paint Dust, Announces New Actions to Address Toxic Lead Exposure* (Oct. 24, 2025) (online at <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/10/24/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-strengthens-standards-to-protect-millions-from-exposure-to-lead-paint-dust-announces-new-actions-to-address-toxic-lead-exposure/>); Food and Drug Administration, *Press release: FDA's Reorganization Approved for Establishing Unified Human Foods Program, New Model for Field Operations and Other Modernization Efforts* (Oct. 1, 2025) (online at www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fdas-reorganization-approved-establishing-unified-human-foods-program-new-model-field-operations-and).

¹³ See *Illnesses From Bacteria in Food Are on the Rise. A Doctor Explain How to Avoid Them*, CNN (Oct. 25, 2025) (www.cnn.com/2024/10/25/health/food-safety-diarrhea-e-coli-wellness/index.html); Food and Drug Administration, *What We Do* (Nov. 21, 2023) (online at www.fda.gov/about-fda/what-we-do#mission).

5. A full and complete list of the title and office of every employee at FDA subject to the terminations announced on March 24, 2025 and implemented beginning April 1, 2025;
6. A full and complete list of every position relating to food safety that HHS eliminated after January 20, 2025;
7. A full and complete list of all food safety or food inspection programs that HHS eliminated after January 20, 2025, including but not limited to food inspections programs overseen by FDA;
8. A detailed description of the data FDA will use to measure whether the mass termination of thousands of employees impacts food safety;
9. All documents and communications relating to the termination of FDA employees, including but not limited to employees who work in food safety, after January 20, 2025;
10. All communications between any individual associated with HHS and any individual associated with the Executive Office of the President regarding termination of employees at FDA; and
11. All communications between any individual associated with HHS and any individual associated with the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) regarding termination of employees at FDA.

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.¹⁴

¹⁴ House Rule X, clause 4(c)(2).

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy Jr.


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If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Committee Democratic staff at (202) 225-5051.

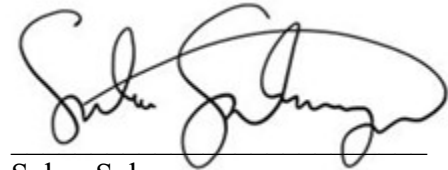
Sincerely,



Gerald E. Connolly
Ranking Member



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health Care and
Financial Services



Suhas Subramanyam
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Military and Foreign Affairs

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman

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

The Honorable William Timmons
Subcommittee on Military and Foreign Affairs