

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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April 24, 2025

Dr. Susan Monarez
Acting Director
U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Acting Director Monarez:

I write with concern regarding reports that the entire staff of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) office tasked with responding to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests has been placed on administrative leave pending their termination. Specifically, Committee Democrats received information that 22 members of the FOIA office were given notice on April 1, 2025, that their last day would be June 2, 2025, and they were immediately placed on administration leave. As a result, there are currently zero personnel available to process FOIA requests received by CDC.¹ The elimination of staff responsible for facilitating FOIA strongly implies an effort by the Administration to prevent the public from obtaining information about their government that they are entitled to request. I urge you to provide detailed information responsive to the requests included in this letter to bring transparency to the FOIA operations within the CDC.

FOIA ensures that the public has a right to access federal agency information. Since its enactment in 1967, it has been crucial to ensuring government transparency and accountability.² FOIA provides that any person may submit a request for agency records and that agencies must comply with the following when responding to such requests:

1. The agency must review and respond with a determination concerning the scope of the records it will disclose and the exemptions it will invoke within 20 business days.³
2. The agency must conduct a search that is “reasonably calculated to uncover all relevant documents.”⁴

¹ Communications with Committee Democratic staff.

² See *What Is FOIA?* (online at www.foia.gov/about.html) (Accessed Mar. 17, 2025).

³ Congressional Research Service, *The Freedom of Information act (FOIA): An Introduction* (updated Dec. 22, 2023) (online at www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF11450).

⁴ Congressional Research Service, *The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA): A Legal Overview* (June 27, 2024) (online at www.congress.gov/crs-product/R46238).

3. With limited exceptions, the agency must disclose records to the requester promptly.⁵

The press and the public have recently used the FOIA process to seek records related to the President's sudden termination of thousands of employees at Health and Human Services (HHS), including CDC. These layoffs and reductions in CDC's capacity come at a time when communities across the United States are struggling to manage infectious disease outbreaks.⁶ Now more than ever, maintaining transparency about the operations of the broader HHS—and CDC in particular—is crucial to understanding the government's capacity to respond to such crises.

To properly respond to FOIA requests in accordance with the law, agencies must have appropriately staffed and functional processing offices. According to Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), upon filing FOIA requests in early April they received an automated response stating the "FOIA office had been placed on admin leave and is unable to respond to any emails."⁷ The removal of the entire FOIA office at CDC greatly diminishes the public's access to accountability and transparency and undermines the agency's ability to meet its legal obligations.

Preserving your agency's ability to respond to FOIA requests is a critical tool to provide the American people the transparency to which they are entitled. In furtherance of the Committee's oversight, I request that you provide the following information to the Committee as soon as possible, but no later than May 8, 2025:

1. CDC's plans to continue to comply with FOIA.
2. The number of full-time equivalent personnel employed in CDC's FOIA office or equivalent office tasked with responding to FOIA requests as of January 20, 2025; February 20, 2025; March 20, 2025; and April 23, 2025.
3. The title and employment status (e.g.: subject to a reduction in force (RIF) in agency's RIF and Reorganization Planning (ARRP), terminated, etc.) for each full-time-equivalent position that was included in CDC's Freedom of Information Act Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2024.
4. Data on the performance of CDC's FOIA office or equivalent office tasked with responding to FOIA requests for the period from January 21, 2025, through April

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ See, for example, *Invasive Strep Throat Strain Has More Than Doubled in US, Reports CDC*, Fox News (April 10, 2025) (online at www.foxnews.com/health/invasive-strep-throat-strain-has-more-doubled-us-reports-cdc); *CDC 'Scraping' to Find Resources to Help States Respond to Growing Measles Outbreaks*, The Hill (April 16, 2025) (online at <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/5252421-cdc-measles-outbreak/>).

⁷ Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, *CREW Sues to Challenge Destruction of CDC FOIA Office*, (April 5, 2025) (online at www.citizensforethics.org/legal-action/lawsuits/crew-sues-to-challenge-destruction-of-cdc-foia-office/).

23, 2025:

- a. Number of requests received, processed, and pending,
 - b. The status of the ten oldest pending requests,
 - c. Number of administrative appeals received and processed,
 - d. Average response times for FOIA requests, and
 - e. Detailed information on the use of FOIA exemptions.
5. All memoranda, guidance, or other correspondence between CDC and Trump Administration officials, including officials at HHS, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and White House officials regarding staffing of your agency's FOIA or equivalent office from January 21, 2025, through April 23, 2025.
 6. All memoranda, guidance, or other correspondence between CDC's Office of General Counsel to staff responsible for responding to and processing FOIA requests regarding the following topics for the period from January 21, 2025, through April 23, 2025:
 - a. The appropriate scope of agency searches for responsive records,
 - b. The scope of FOIA disclosures, including proposed blanket limitations,
 - c. The nature and scope of exemptions that should be invoked as a matter of policy, and
 - d. The appropriate period of time for responding to FOIA requests and disclosing responsive records.

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. The Committee has legislative jurisdiction over "public information and records, including the Freedom of Information Act, the National Archives and Records Administration, and the Presidential Records Act." The information requested in this letter will inform potential legislative reforms to the federal civil service.

Sincerely,



Gerald E. Connolly
Ranking Member

Dr. Susan Monarez

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cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman