

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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June 23, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We write with continued concern over the Trump Administration's rollback of lifesaving food inspection and disease surveillance activities, termination of thousands of critical Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) personnel, and lack of communication with the American public about emerging, life-threatening diseases. On April 8, 2025, Ranking Members Gerald E. Connolly, Raja Krishnamoorthi, and Suhas Subramanyam wrote to you with deep concern that the firing of thousands of Food and Drug Administration (FDA) employees would lead to rampant outbreaks of foodborne illness.¹ To date, HHS has provided no response and has not produced any of the requested information, even as foodborne illnesses and infectious diseases continue to spread. We therefore reiterate the requests for information and documents from the April 8, 2025, letter, and request additional information regarding the Trump Administration's failure to communicate with the American public regarding foodborne illness and infectious disease outbreaks.

In February, the Trump Administration reportedly decided not to publicize FDA's findings pinpointing an outbreak of *E. coli* bacteria in romaine lettuce to a particular producer, even as that outbreak sickened nearly 90 people across 15 states. Internal HHS communications indicate that FDA knew the source of the outbreak as early as February 11, 2025, but in an alarming deviation from past precedent, the Trump Administration failed to alert the public. These notifications of where diseases originate serve an important role in preventing additional cases, including by putting pressure on growers to improve their sanitation practices and identifying growers that are the source of multiple outbreaks. The FDA has also reportedly suspended the Food Emergency Response Network Proficiency Testing program—which ensures that labs conducting food testing are able to accurately identify pathogens that can lead to illness or death—and announced it is delaying the deadline for compliance with a rule issued by the Biden Administration that would increase the speed at which potentially contaminated

¹ Letter from Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform to Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Department of Health and Human Services (Apr. 8, 2025) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-oversight.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2025-04-08.ranking-members-gec-rk-and-ss-to-hhs-jfkjr-re-fda-terminations.pdf>).

food can be identified and removed from the market.² This work is critical: each year, outbreaks of foodborne illnesses sicken approximately 9 million people, hospitalize approximately 56,000 people, and kill approximately 1,300 people.³

The Trump Administration has also deprioritized food safety beyond the halls of HHS. In April 2025, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) withdrew a proposed regulation to reduce the prevalence of *salmonella* in raw poultry, which would have prevented 3,000 human illnesses and saved \$13 million in associated costs annually. The Trump Administration also eliminated a Department of Justice (DOJ) unit that pursued legal actions against companies that sell contaminated food.⁴

These actions reflect a broader trend of placing corporate and political interests above the health and safety of Americans, including by limiting communication with the public about the spread of deadly diseases. Many Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) newsletters on the status of infectious disease are no longer distributed, and the CDC's Health Alert Network that sent alerts about disease outbreaks to health professionals has not issued a dispatch since March 2025. Cases of measles, *listeria*, *salmonella*, Hepatitis A Virus (HAV) and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) have spread throughout the United States. Yet the public is receiving few critical warnings. According to one CDC worker who spoke to National Public Radio, "we are functionally unable to operate communications," and "we feel like our hands are tied behind our backs." Former CDC communications director Kevin Griffis stated, "All the points of contact that we generally rely on to communicate with the American people have either been eliminated or dramatically reduced."⁵

On January 31, 2025, Ranking Member Connolly wrote to HHS, expressing alarm over a Trump Administration policy requiring HHS operating divisions to refrain from publicly issuing any document or communication until it was reviewed and approved by a presidential appointee.⁶ This policy has since been lifted, but while it was in effect HHS failed to release its standard weekly morbidity and mortality reports, preventing medical providers and the public

² *E. Coli Outbreak Sickened More Than 80 people, but Details Didn't Surface*, Washington Post (May 26, 2025) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/health/2025/05/26/food-safety-fda-ecoli-contamination/).

³ 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 <https://www.axios.com/2025/02/20/fda-food-division-cuts>).

⁴ *E. Coli Outbreak Sickened More Than 80 people, but Details Didn't Surface*, Washington Post (May 26, 2025) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/health/2025/05/26/food-safety-fda-ecoli-contamination/).

⁵ *Diseases Are Spreading. The CDC Isn't Warning the Public Like it Was Months Ago*, NPR (May 21, 2025) (online at www.npr.org/2025/05/21/nx-s1-5387723/cdc-communications-cuts-social-media-public-health#:~:text=The%20CDC%20isn't%20warning%20the%20public%20like%20it%20was%20months%20ago,-May%2021%2C%202025&text=To%20accomplish%20its%20mission%20of,information%22%20to%20protect%20the%20nation).

⁶ Letter from Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform to Acting Secretary Dorothy Fink, Department of Health and Human Services (Jan. 31, 2025) (<https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-oversight.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2025-01-31.%20GEC%20to%20Fink-HHS%20re.%20Scientific%20Integrity.pdf>).

from seeing accurate counts of the spread of nationally notifiable diseases like measles and influenza.⁷

You and the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) have aggressively slashed HHS operations, which has exacerbated the Administration's inability to protect the food supply and communicate with the public about outbreaks of life-threatening diseases. These cuts include approximately 170 employees in the FDA Office of Inspections and Investigations, even as food safety programs at FDA have been chronically underfunded for decades.⁸ 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.⁹

Also included in the mass firings at HHS were individuals directly responsible for communicating with the American public about disease outbreaks, as well as communications and website specialists who work on consumer outreach designed to prevent illness.¹⁰ Though you claimed that the streamlining of communications offices is necessary to increase “radical transparency” with the American public, evidence suggests that that, at best, the cutbacks prevent critical communications from going out to the American people.¹¹

I am concerned that these cuts may also be designed to prevent scientific information from being disseminated. Although CDC personnel with scientific expertise previously operated

⁷ *Diseases Are Spreading. The CDC Isn't Warning the Public Like it Was Months Ago*, NPR (May 21, 2025) (online at www.npr.org/2025/05/21/nx-s1-5387723/cdc-communications-cuts-social-media-public-health#:~:text=The%20CDC%20isn't%20warning%20the%20public%20like%20it%20was%20months%20ago,-May%2021%2C%202025&text=To%20accomplish%20its%20mission%20of,information%22%20to%20protect%20the%20nation.)).

⁸ *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/); *Food Safety Jeopardized by Onslaught of Funding and Staff Cuts*, New York Times (Mar. 19, 2025) (online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/19/health/food-safety-trump-fda-cutbacks-deadly-outbreaks.html>); *Food Safety Measures Severely Underfunded*, CBS News (Apr. 7, 2015) (online at www.cbsnews.com/news/food-safety-policies-severely-underfunded/).

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); *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/).

¹⁰ *Kennedy Guts Teams That Share Health Information with the Public*, New York Times (Apr. 2, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/04/02/well/hhs-workers-cuts-rfk-jr.html); *Food Safety Measures Severely Underfunded*, CBS News (Apr. 7, 2015) (online at www.cbsnews.com/news/food-safety-policies-severely-underfunded/); *E. Coli Outbreak Sickened More Than 80 people, but Details Didn't Surface*, Washington Post (May 26, 2025) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/health/2025/05/26/food-safety-fda-ecoli-contamination/).

¹¹ See, e.g., *Diseases Are Spreading. The CDC Isn't Warning the Public Like it Was Months Ago*, NPR (May 21, 2025) (online at www.npr.org/2025/05/21/nx-s1-5387723/cdc-communications-cuts-social-media-public-health#:~:text=The%20CDC%20isn't%20warning%20the%20public%20like%20it%20was%20months%20ago,-May%2021%2C%202025&text=To%20accomplish%20its%20mission%20of,information%22%20to%20protect%20the%20nation); *Kennedy Guts Teams That Share Health Information with the Public*, New York Times (Apr. 2, 2025) (online at www.nytimes.com/2025/04/02/well/hhs-workers-cuts-rfk-jr.html).

CDC's social media, HHS is now overseeing these accounts. This policy is reportedly creating a significant backlog of public communications, and according to CDC employees, fewer than half of the public health social media posts they've sent to HHS have been approved for distribution. These posts include routine information like the number of individuals sickened or hospitalized in recent disease outbreaks. This can have deadly consequences for people who need to know that the food they are consuming could be contaminated—for example, consuming foods contaminated with *listeria* while pregnant can cause miscarriage or stillbirth.¹²

As the U.S. faces multiple outbreaks of foodborne illness and infectious diseases like measles and avian influenza, it is vital that HHS disseminate critical information to the public as quickly and as easily as possible. To understand the ways that HHS may be hiding information about foodborne illness and infectious disease from the American public, we request that you provide the following documents and information—as well as all documents and information requested in the April 8, 2025, letter from Ranking Members Connolly, Krishnamoorthi, and Subramanyam—by July 7, 2025:

1. All internal policies and communications regarding the approval and dissemination of social media posts, newsletters, or any other public-facing source of information on infectious diseases from January 20, 2025, to the present;
2. All documents and communications regarding FDA's February 2025 decision not to publicize the source of the *E. coli* outbreak in contaminated lettuce;
3. All documents and communications regarding FDA's decision to suspend the Food Emergency Response Network Proficiency Testing program; and
4. A detailed list of all positions eliminated at HHS since January 20, 2025, related to food inspection, food and agricultural investigations, disease and illness prevention, and agency communications.


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 regarding this request, please contact Committee Democratic staff at (202) 225-5051. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

¹² *Diseases Are Spreading. The CDC Isn't Warning the Public Like It Was Months Ago*, NPR (May 21, 2025) (online at [www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/listeria-and-pregnancy](https://www.npr.org/2025/05/21/nx-s1-5387723/cdc-communications-cuts-social-media-public-health#:~:text=The%20CDC%20isn't%20warning%20the%20public%20like%20it%20was%20months%20ago,-May%2021%2C%202025&text=To%20accomplish%20its%20mission%20of,information%22%20to%20protect%20the%20nation); The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, <i>Listeria and Pregnancy</i> (Aug. 2022) (online at <a href=)).

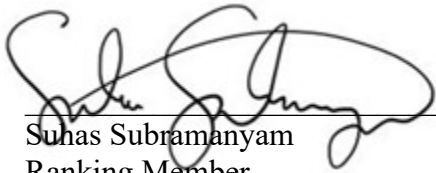
Sincerely,



Stephen F. Lynch
Acting Ranking Member



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health Care
and Financial Services



Suhas Subramanyam
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Military
and Foreign Affairs

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman

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

The Honorable William Timmons, Chairman
Subcommittee on the Military and Foreign Affairs