

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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August 18, 2025

The Honorable Dr. Susan Monarez
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Dr. Monarez:

I am deeply concerned about the inadequate response by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and its parent agency, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), to the deadly shooting at CDC's headquarters in Atlanta, which claimed the life of a law enforcement officer. Despite the severity of the violence, with the shooter emptying more than 500 rounds in an attack on six CDC buildings and the resulting death of DeKalb County Police Department Officer David Rose, HHS and CDC leadership have done little to protect the safety of their employees, address the Trump Administration's own role in promoting the anti-vaccine misinformation that motivated the shooter's violence, or respond to the threats and harassment that make it harder for those public health agencies to fulfill their mission of protecting the health of the American people.

On Friday, August 8, 2025, a shooter opened fire at the CDC campus in Atlanta, firing nearly 500 rounds of ammunition.¹ Approximately 200 bullets struck at least four buildings on campus, breaking approximately 150 windows, including those made of "blast-resistant" glass.² Although CDC security guards stopped the shooter from entering campus, preventing a potentially much deadlier attack, the shooter was still able to shoot hundreds of rounds of ammunition at CDC buildings.³ CDC employees were forced to shelter in place for hours, as were children in the agency's childcare center.⁴

¹ *Gunman in CDC Shooting Fired Nearly 500 Shots After Breaking Into His Father's Gun Safe. Here's What We Know*, CNN (Aug. 12, 2025) (online at www.cnn.com/2025/08/12/us/cdc-atlanta-shooting-shots-windows).

² *Id.*; *CDC Shooting: 150 Windows Pierced by Bullets, Employees Fear Recognition*, Fox 5 Atlanta (Aug. 12, 2025) (online at www.fox5atlanta.com/news/cdc-shooting-150-windows-pierced-bullets-employees-fear-recognition).

³ *Shooter Attacked CDC Headquarters to Protest COVID-19 Vaccines*, AP News (Aug. 12, 2025) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/cdc-shooting-georgia-gunman-slain-officer-085d0d46cf2095193f9a65807876ebd5>).

⁴ *CDC Employees Recount When Gunman Fired at Least 180 Shots at Buildings: "Shocking But Not Surprising"*, CBS News (Aug. 12, 2025) (online at www.cbsnews.com/news/cdc-atlanta-shooting-employees-react-rfk-statement/).

According to law enforcement, the shooter targeted CDC because he believed that the COVID-19 vaccines made him sick and he “wanted to make the public aware of his public distrust of the vaccines.”⁵ Although hostility towards public health and health care workers is not new, it gained significant ground during the COVID-19 pandemic as angry protestors confronted public officials and frontline workers, sometimes even resorting to violence.⁶ This distrust of health care professionals has been amplified by anti-vaccine activists, including by HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., a leading voice in spreading misinformation about vaccines.⁷ Before becoming secretary, Mr. Kennedy promoted misinformation about the COVID-19 vaccine, calling it “the deadliest vaccine ever made” and claiming that it contained “poison.”⁸ As HHS Secretary, he has continued to make false and misleading statements about vaccine safety, including COVID-19 vaccines, and has platformed anti-vaccine activists at official CDC proceedings.⁹ It is not surprising that such misinformation, and the distrust and vitriol that it spurs, can lead to violence. Following the shooting at CDC headquarters, one CDC employee stated, “I’m actually surprised it didn’t happen sooner.”¹⁰

There is bipartisan concern about the ways that anti-vaccine activism leads to violence against the people working every day to keep America healthy. Jerome Adams, who served as Surgeon General during President Trump’s first term, recently wrote an op-ed criticizing anti-vaccine rhetoric and warning of how it contributed to the deadly shooting at the CDC campus: “This tragedy is not an isolated event. It is a dire reflection of ever-escalating threats public health workers face in a climate increasingly shaped by misinformation, politicization, and inflammatory rhetoric.”¹¹ Dr. Adams also called out the Trump Administration’s role in contributing to misinformation, writing, “When influential figures amplify falsehoods, they legitimize the anger that leads to violence. Public health professionals, from CDC scientists to local health officials, face harassment, threats, and now gunfire for doing their jobs. This is unacceptable, yet the administration has offered a late and lukewarm condemnation of the

⁵ *Shooter Attacked CDC Headquarters to Protest COVID-19 Vaccines*, AP News (Aug. 12, 2025) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/cdc-shooting-georgia-gunman-slain-officer-085d0d46cf2095193f9a65807876ebd5>); *Gunman in CDC Shooting Fired Nearly 500 Shots After Breaking Into His Father’s Gun Safe. Here’s What We Know*, CNN (Aug. 12, 2025) (online at www.cnn.com/2025/08/12/us/cdc-atlanta-shooting-shots-windows).

⁶ *Shooter Attacked CDC Headquarters to Protest COVID-19 Vaccines*, AP News (Aug. 12, 2025) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/cdc-shooting-georgia-gunman-slain-officer-085d0d46cf2095193f9a65807876ebd5>).

⁷ *CDC Shooting Marks Latest in a String of Hostility Directed at Health Workers. Many Aren’t Surprised*, AP News (Aug. 13, 2025) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/cdc-shooting-vaccines-healthcare-workers-kennedy-69a4c75eac4fdd9fa13f58698d4c6c8>).

⁸ *After CDC Shooting, its Employees Turn Their Anger to RFK Jr. and Trump*, Washington Post (Aug. 12, 2025) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/health/2025/08/12/cdc-shooting-atlanta-rfk-vaccine/).

⁹ *Democrats Challenged RFK Jr. on Vaccines. Fireworks Ensued.*, Politico (June 24, 2025) (online at www.politico.com/news/2025/06/24/rfk-jr-isnt-hiding-his-plans-for-vaccines-democrats-say-it-will-cost-lives-00421525); *Former Leader of Anti-Vaccine Group Founded by RFK Jr. to Present at First Meeting of New CDC Vaccine Advisers*, CNN (June 24, 2025) (online at www.cnn.com/2025/06/23/health/cdc-vaccine-meeting-thimerosal-lyn-redwood).

¹⁰ *I’m Actually Surprised It Didn’t Happen Sooner*, The Atlantic (Aug. 9, 2025) (online at www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2025/08/cdc-shooting-trump-kennedy/683814/).

¹¹ *Former Surgeon General: The CDC Shooting Must be a Wakeup Call*, STAT (Aug. 9, 2025) (online at www.statnews.com/2025/08/09/cdc-shooting-anti-vaccine-violence-rhetoric-public-health-workers/).

shooting, and has thus far failed to address the rhetoric fueling it.”¹²

As anti-vaccine misinformation promoted by Trump Administration officials like Secretary Kennedy has villainized federal employees and created a culture of misinformation and dehumanization, CDC employees and federal employees across the government are looking to agency leadership to defend federal workers, to protect their safety, and to condemn the violence and the anti-vaccine misinformation that has made it possible.¹³ CDC staff have felt “deeply disappointed and frustrated” by what they see as the lack of leadership following the shooting, particularly from the highest levels of HHS and the Trump Administration.¹⁴ CDC leadership acknowledged the role that vaccine misinformation played in the shooting, writing in an email to staff that “...the dangers of misinformation and its promulgation has now led to deadly consequences.”¹⁵ Yet mere hours after visiting the site of the shooting, Secretary Kennedy continued to promote misinformation about CDC, saying during an interview that during the COVID-19 pandemic CDC was “saying things that are not always true.”¹⁶ Employees at CDC have voiced concerns about future threats and prioritizing security improvements.¹⁷ A short agency-wide call on Tuesday, the first since the shooting the Friday before, did little to assuage employee concerns.¹⁸ Reports of a full security assessment and additional security teams are an important start, but more must be done by agency and Administration leadership to protect CDC and federal employees and address the anti-vaccine misinformation that contributed to the shooting.¹⁹

Medical misinformation and growing hostility towards public health has consequences not only for officials who are targeted by such hostility, but also for the American public at large. In recent years, many public health workers have felt forced to leave their jobs when faced with violent threats. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, threats against public health

¹² *Former Surgeon General: The CDC Shooting Must be a Wakeup Call*, STAT (Aug. 9, 2025) (online at www.statnews.com/2025/08/09/cdc-shooting-anti-vaccine-violence-rhetoric-public-health-workers/).

¹³ *Dear Decaturish — Silence is the Loudest Thing in the Room*, Decaturish (Aug. 12, 2025) (online at www.decatrish.com/public_safety/dear-decatrish-silence-is-the-loudest-thing-in-the-room/article_b69b2946-1eca-450d-83a7-90fc98f98dd4.html).

¹⁴ *CDC Employees Recount When Gunman Fired at Least 180 Shots at Buildings: "Shocking But Not Surprising"*, CBS News (Aug. 12, 2025) (online at www.cbsnews.com/news/cdc-atlanta-shooting-employees-react-rfk-statement/).

¹⁵ *CDC Director Says Misinformation 'Led to Deadly Consequences' in Campus Shooting*, ABC News (Aug. 12, 2025) (online at <https://abcnews.go.com/US/suspected-gunman-cdc-shooting-fired-500-rounds-officials/story?id=124577732>).

¹⁶ *RFK Jr. in Interview with Scripps News: 'Trusting the Experts is Not Science'*, Scripps News (Aug. 12, 2025) (online at www.scrippsnews.com/health/rfk-jr-in-interview-with-scripps-news-trusting-the-experts-is-not-science).

¹⁷ *CDC Staff Voice Fears About Agency's Security Vulnerabilities in Internal Calls*, STAT (Aug. 12, 2025) (online at www.statnews.com/2025/08/12/cdc-shooting-staff-concerns-security-rhetoric-rfk-jr/).

¹⁸ *CDC Leaders Attempt to Reassure Staff After Shooting, but Meeting is Brief*, STAT (Aug. 12, 2025) (online at www.statnews.com/2025/08/12/cdc-all-hands-meeting-wake-of-gunman-attack/).

¹⁹ *CDC Staff Voice Fears About Agency's Security Vulnerabilities in Internal Calls*, STAT (Aug. 12, 2025) (online at www.statnews.com/2025/08/12/cdc-shooting-staff-concerns-security-rhetoric-rfk-jr/).

officials led to the greatest exodus of public health experts in American history.²⁰ It was not unusual for public health officials at every level of government to face death threats. One official in Orange County, California resigned after receiving death threats that necessitated a security detail, and many others stepped down in the face of potential violence.²¹ In addition to the hundreds of public health officials who have resigned in the face of harassment and workplace violence, research has shown that this hostility may limit recruitment of future leaders, making it more difficult for experts to respond to new public health crises.²² Public health agencies work to protect and promote the health and well-being of communities across the country, including by preventing disease spread, ensuring that medications are safe and effective, increasing access to health care services, and providing information that people need to make informed choices about their health.²³ But these agencies can only do this critical work if they have adequate staff to carry out that mission.²⁴

We should be standing in solidarity with our public health workforce, which means ensuring that they are able to do their work on behalf of the American people safely and without fearing for their lives. To ensure Congress can effectively perform its statutorily required oversight role, I request that you provide a briefing by September 2, 2025, and regular updates thereafter regarding:

1. How you will keep employees and staff safe at the CDC campus in Atlanta, including completed and planned safety and security upgrades;
2. How you are ensuring the safety of CDC employees and staff at other offices, including those in Washington, DC and across the country;
3. What support services and workplace flexibilities are being offered to staff at CDC in the aftermath of this traumatic event; and

²⁰ *Health Officials Had to Face a Pandemic. Then Came the Death Threats.*, The New York Times (June 22, 2020) (online at www.nytimes.com/2020/06/22/us/coronavirus-health-officials.html); *Some Public Health Officials are Resigning Amid Threats During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, CNN (June 23, 2020) (online at www.cnn.com/2020/06/22/us/health-officials-threats-coronavirus/); *Major Exodus Among Public Health Officials During Pandemic*, ABC News (Feb. 5, 2021) (online at <https://abcnews.go.com/US/major-exodus-public-health-officials-pandemic/story?id=75679880>).

²¹ *Orange County Public Health Officer Resigns in Coronavirus Controversy*, Los Angeles Times (June 9, 2020) (online at www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-06-09/orange-county-public-health-officer-resigns-amid-controversy-over-face-coverings); *Health Officials Had to Face a Pandemic. Then Came the Death Threats.*, The New York Times (June 22, 2020) (online at www.nytimes.com/2020/06/22/us/coronavirus-health-officials.html).

²² *Public Health Officials Detail Threats, Changed Landscape Post-Pandemic*, University of Minnesota Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (Dec. 11, 2023) (online at www.cidrap.umn.edu/covid-19/public-health-officials-detail-threats-changed-landscape-post-pandemic).

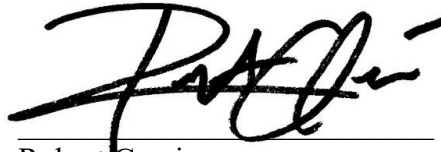
²³ See KFF, *U.S. Public Health* (Mar. 6, 2025) (online at www.kff.org/health-policy/101-u-s-public-health/?entry=table-of-contents-what-is-public-health).

²⁴ Government Accountability Office, *Public Health Preparedness: HHS and Jurisdictions Have Taken Some Steps to Address Challenging Workforce Gaps*, (Jan. 29, 2025) (GAO-25-107002) (online at www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-107002); *Health Officials Had to Face a Pandemic. Then Came the Death Threats.*, New York Times (June 22, 2020) (online at www.nytimes.com/2020/06/22/us/coronavirus-health-officials.html).

4. What efforts are being made to address hostility and harassment faced by public health and health care professionals at CDC and beyond.

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 request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Garcia', written over a horizontal line.

Robert Garcia
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman