

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 3, 2025

The Honorable Donald J. Trump President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

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

Dear President Trump and Secretary Kennedy,

The World Trade Center Health Program (WTCHP) provides critical medical treatment, research, and monitoring to over 137,000 responders and survivors of the September 11th terrorist attacks,¹ living in every state and nearly every Congressional district. The WTCHP serves first responders and survivors from the World Trade Center and lower Manhattan, the Pentagon, and the crash site in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. This vital program provides life-saving care to the heroes who answered the call to serve in one of our nation's darkest hours and the survivors who are forced to live with the health consequences from the attacks every single day.

We were appalled at the recent announcement that the Department of Health and Human Services cut two-thirds of the staff at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), under which the WTCHP operates.² We understand that your plan is to ultimately eliminate all NIOSH staff in the next few days.

Since the establishment of the WTCHP in 2011, the number of program enrollees has more than doubled from 61,000 to 137,000.³ The WTCHP relies on NIOSH staff to fulfill many of its obligations under the law, and eliminating staff that implement it, especially as more and more responders and survivors fall ill with 9/11-related conditions, will directly interfere with program operations and undermine access to the treatment these heroes have earned and deserve.

For example, the WTCHP does not employ any staff physicians or individuals with medical degrees. Under the statute medical doctors need to

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/wtc/ataglance_2024_0331.html#enrollmentWTC

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/rfk-jr-layoffs-hhs-niosh-worker-safety-agency/>

³ https://www.cdc.gov/wtc/ataglance_2024_0331.html#enrollmentWTC.

approve certifications of members coming forward with new conditions that meet the requirements of the law for them to receive treatment. The WTCHP has always used NIOSH doctors to perform this work.

Additionally, the WTCHP does not have a staff epidemiologist and has always used NIOSH epidemiologists to review pending petitions for considering whether to add new conditions to the list of covered conditions. The WTCHP also currently uses NIOSH staff to determine the awards of research grants in the amount of nearly \$20 million dollars a year, an annual requirement of the program to fund research on 9/11 conditions and care.

We are extremely concerned regarding the dismissal of Dr. John Howard, the Program Administrator of WTCHP. Since the program's inception, Dr. Howard has faithfully served as the Administrator, playing a critical role as the final decision-maker on determining which petitioned conditions should be covered and ensuring the WTCHP is adhering to the explicit statutes enacted by Congress. His institutional knowledge is unmatched and allows the program to operate effectively and efficiently. It is estimated that over 400,000 individuals were exposed to toxins or other hazards on 9/11, and we are gravely concerned that his termination will undermine the essential work the WTCHP does.⁴

Finally, we are concerned about the termination of the staff at the Office of Acquisition Services at NIOSH. The Office of Acquisition Services oversees all contracts for the WTCHP's Nationwide Provider Network (NPN), which is a vast network of contracted health providers throughout the country that provide the medical monitoring and treatment for program enrollees who live outside the New York metropolitan area. This office ensures these contracts and providers meet the needs of enrollees and provides oversight and quality assurance for the NPN. Without this coordinating mechanism, current contracts could receive little oversight and that future contracts could lapse, undermining access to enrollee care.

We are asking that the Administration provide answers on how the WTCHP will be impacted by these massive layoffs. Please respond to the below list of questions by April 9th, 2025.

1. Is the Administration planning to terminate all NIOSH staff?
2. What was the justification for the termination of Dr. Howard?
3. Since there are no doctors on the staff of the WTCHP, and the statute requires doctors to sign off on certifications that allow for treatment of members, what is the administration's plan to rectify this as all of the NIOSH medical staff that performed this function have been terminated?

⁴ https://www.cdc.gov/wtc/administrator_20240911.html

4. Since the WTCHP used the staff of NIOSH, especially epidemiologists to review pending petitions under the law to consider covering new conditions, what provisions has HHS made to supply the necessary staff to fulfill that role for the WTCHP?
5. What is the status of pending petitions to add autoimmune disease and cardiac conditions to the program? The program announced in December 2024 that eligible individuals can expect an answer by March 2025.
6. WTCHP utilized NIOSH staff to determine the approximately \$20 million of annual research awards required under the statute that are normally announced in March. What staff will be assisting WTCHP in making these decisions and when will the awards for 2025 be announced?
7. Has the administration consulted with advocates or career staff on the impacts these cuts may have on WTCHP service delivery?
 - a. If you have not, please explain why.
8. What office will oversee the contracts and contracting process if there is no staff at the Office of Acquisition Services?

Congress has continually reaffirmed its bipartisan commitment to the responders and survivors of the September 11th attacks. We stand ready to work with you to reverse these cuts to ensure that current and future participants receive the coverage and care that Congress has continuously provided.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Andrew R. Garbarino
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Michael V. Lawler
Member of Congress



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Hakeem Jeffries
Member of Congress



Dan Goldman
Member of Congress



Nick LaLota
Member of Congress



Paul Tonko
Member of Congress



Nicole Malliotakis
Member of Congress



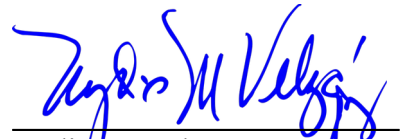
Laura A. Gillen
Member of Congress



Patrick K. Ryan
Member of Congress



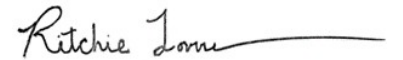
Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



Gregory W. Meeks
Member of Congress



Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress



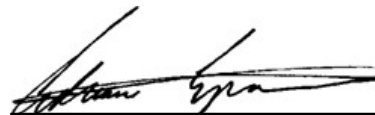
George Latimer
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



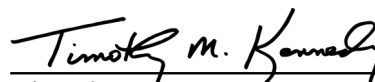
Thomas R. Suozzi
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Timothy M. Kennedy
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Yvette D. Clarke
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Joseph D. Morelle
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Josh Gottheimer
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Richard Blumenthal
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John B. Larson
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Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress



Mikie Sherrill
Member of Congress



Nellie Pou
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