

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 5, 2025

The Honorable Dorothy Fink, MD
Acting HHS Secretary
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Ave.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Acting Secretary Fink:

We write to express our deep concern over the Administration's recent decision to freeze external communications and suspend federal health funding at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The abrupt order has already disrupted patient care, public health oversight, halted medical research funding, and obstructed critical regulatory processes.

On January 22, all 13 HHS operating divisions – including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) were told to immediately “pause” all external communications and grant disbursements until at least February 1, with no clear plan for restoration. This directive prohibits agencies from issuing public health advisories, publishing scientific reports, updating websites, announcing regulatory decisions, or conducting outreach to patient groups – unless such activity is explicitly approved by politically appointed leadership.

With the Administration's own deadline having passed, it remains unclear when these restrictions will be lifted. While limited exceptions exist for critical health, safety, or national security concerns, the freeze has already severely impeded essential public health and biomedical research functions.

The CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), the nation's premier publication for disseminating public health updates, was abruptly delayed for the first time in over 60 years, limiting reporting on the H5N1 bird flu outbreak and other emerging infectious disease threats. The MMWR often includes clinical recommendations for doctors, such as guidance on how to treat diseases that are currently circulating in the United States – and delaying the MMWR means that doctors may not have all the latest information they need to keep their patients healthy.

At the NIH, new clinical trials have been delayed and external peer-review grant processes have faced disruptions. NIH study sections – which legally must review grant applications before funding can be disbursed – were initially canceled, creating uncertainty about when federal research funds will be awarded. Despite efforts by the Administration to provide clarity, it remains unclear whether the full peer-review process has resumed and how long grant funding decisions will continue to be delayed. This uncertainty has placed billions in federal research funds in limbo, directly threatening ongoing medical studies and academic research programs.

The freeze has also blocked NIH from engaging with patient groups on ways to recruit participants into ongoing clinical trials. This means that patients with rare diseases, cancer, and other serious conditions who rely on clinical trials for treatments may be prevented from enrolling, directly jeopardizing their access to life-saving care.

This political interference in public health agencies is unprecedented and unacceptable. While it is not unusual for a new administration to conduct brief reviews of existing programs, no past transition has implemented a blanket freeze of this magnitude.

Accordingly, we request an immediate and detailed response to the following questions by Monday, February 10:

1. Provide a full accounting of all scientific reports, disease surveillance updates, grant decisions, public health advisories, events, calls, research reviews, reports, issue briefs, inspections, surveys, and postings that have been postponed or cancelled since noon on January 20.
2. Which of the postponed or cancelled items will be rescheduled or published, and by what date?
3. Has the pause affected communications between HHS and other federal Departments or state agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture. If so, in what capacity?
4. Can you confirm that all external communications, including those listed above in your answer to the first question, have already resumed or will resume by February 10? If not, please provide a detailed explanation for any continued delay.
5. Has the communications and funding freeze affected the department's ability to respond promptly to public health threats and ongoing outbreaks? If so, in what ways?
6. Given that we are at the height of virus season, how has this pause affected the department's ability to fulfill its core mission of protecting public health?

The American people depend on HHS agencies to provide accurate, real-time information about disease outbreaks, medical research, and regulatory decisions. We urge you to immediately reverse this harmful decision.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request. We look forward to your response and to working with the Department to protect public health and ensure Americans can get the care they need.

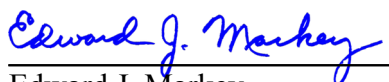
Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



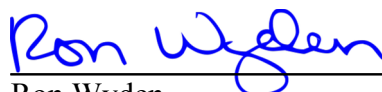
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



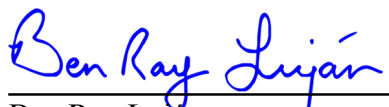
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator




Peter Welch
United States Senator



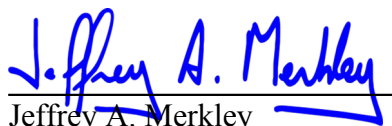
Ron Wyden
United States Senator




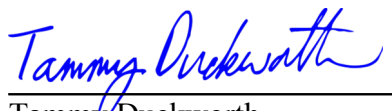
Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator

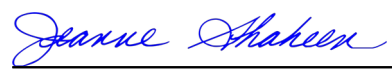



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

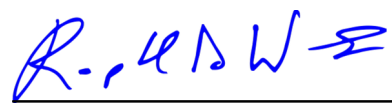

Jeffrey A. Merkley
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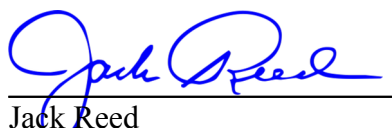

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

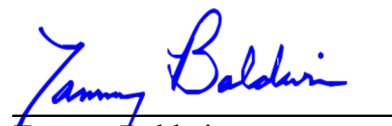

Tammy Duckworth
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Jeanne Shaheen
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Tim Kaine
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Raphael Warnock
United States Senator


Jack Reed
United States Senator

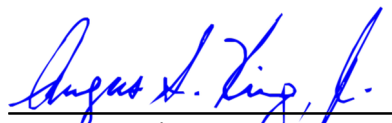

Tammy Baldwin
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Jacky Rosen
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Kirsten Gillibrand
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Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

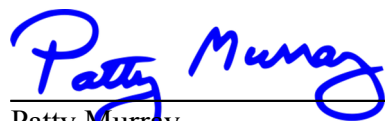

Andy Kim
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Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator


Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



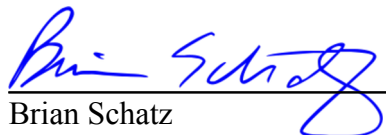
Patty Murray
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
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Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Elissa Slotkin
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