

United States Senate

March 27, 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 to express our deep concerns regarding the recent terminations of probationary staff at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). On February 14, 2025, approximately 10 percent of SAMHSA's workforce was dismissed, and we understand that significantly more dismissals, up to 50 percent, are imminent at SAMHSA.

According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 48.5 million Americans aged 12 and older battled a substance use disorder in 2023, and 58.7 million Americans aged 18 and older experienced a mental health condition. Over the past 22 years, suicide rates have increased 36 percent. Suicide is among the leading causes of death for people ages 10-64 and is the second leading cause of death for people aged 10-14 and 25-24. We are deeply troubled that in the midst of our nation's mental health and substance use crisis, the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) saw fit to downsize the agency responsible for fighting these twin epidemics.

While all Members of Congress agree with ending waste, fraud, and abuse in the government, these recent dismissals do not serve that goal. As you know, a significant portion of SAMHSA's mission is to provide grants and resources for states, Tribes, nonprofits, and community-based organizations. In 2024, SAMHSA distributed over \$6.9 billion to states, localities, and tribes to fund lifesaving mental health and substance use disorder programs. Further cuts to SAMHSA's staff will hamper its ability to conduct appropriate oversight of these grants. In short, further staff reductions will increase the risk of fraud, waste, and abuse, not decrease it.

We hope that you share our strong view that between the over 10% of staff that was previously dismissed and the staff that participated in the Deferred Resignation Program, SAMHSA has experienced a significant staff reduction that is already imperiling its services and endangering the lives of countless Americans. As has been reported, two SAMHSA regional offices (Regions 4 & 5) have been forced to effectively close as there is no longer staff to run these offices. This has left Americans in 14 states without any access to regional officials to help administer local grants and oversee life-saving substance use and mental health programs in these communities.

We are also gravely concerned about the impacts of previous dismissals and future staffing cuts to the SAMHSA-administrated 9-8-8 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. As you know, President Trump signed into law the *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020*, which created the 9-8-8 Lifeline, that has served over 14.5 million Americans since it went live in July 2022. Additional SAMHSA layoffs risk decimating the Lifeline and doing fundamental harm to the President Trump's legacy.

Given the serious effects that previous layoffs have already had on SAMHSA's workforce and the crippling effects further layoffs would have, we ask that you respond to the following questions in writing by April 4, 2025.

1. Provide the total number of full-time equivalents SAMHSA had on January 17, 2025.
2. Provide the total number of full-time equivalents SAMHSA had on February 13, 2025.
3. Provide the total number of SAMHSA employees terminated on February 14, 2025, including the total number of Veterans.
4. Provide the total number of SAMHSA employees who primarily work on the 988 National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline terminated on February 14, 2025.
5. Provide the total number of SAMHSA employees who were terminated on February 14, 2025, and have since been reinstated.
6. Will you abide by Judge Alsup's March 13, 2025, order to reinstate probationary workers who were fired? If so, when will these reinstatements begin and how many employees will be reinstated? If not, why will you not abide by this court ruling?
7. SAMHSA's regional offices in regions 4 and 5 closed due to termination orders. Will you commit to reopening these offices public in these 14 states? If so, when will these offices be reopened and how many employees will return to each regional office?
8. Will you commit to not conducting additional layoffs at SAMHSA?

As President Trump noted in the March 6, 2025, cabinet meeting, staffing decisions will be led by Cabinet Secretaries, not DOGE. Therefore, we strongly urge you to reconsider these devastating cuts and instead work to ensure that SAMHSA and the American people have the resources they need to fully address their mental and behavioral health concerns.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla

United States Senator



Angela Alsobrooks
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



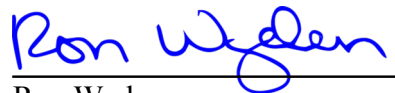
Tina Smith
United States Senator



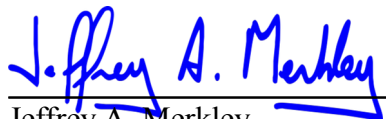
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



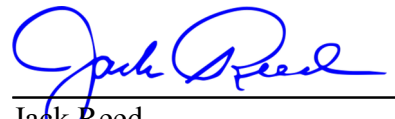
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



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Michael F. Bennet
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Adam B. Schiff
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