

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4606

April 8, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We write today with alarming concern about reports that nearly the entire workforce that works to improve the health of miners was laid off and the office that oversees this work was eliminated. We urge you to reverse course immediately and ensure the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) continues its important work in our states to protect and serve our constituents.

According to reports, HHS is laying off approximately 873 employees, or two-thirds, of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).¹ According to a notification provided to AFGE Local 1969, whose federal employee members are being impacted, all employees working on mining safety and health in NIOSH's Spokane, WA and Pittsburgh, PA, offices are being let go.^{2,3} The NIOSH Pittsburgh Mining Research Division focuses on coal miner safety, and the Spokane Mining Research Division specializes in hard rock mining, and are the two main research hubs for NIOSH's Mining Research Program. Additionally, reports indicate more than 185 NIOSH employees are being laid off from its Morgantown, WV, office, who also work to protect miner health, among other occupational safety and health activities.⁴

We also have heard from those who work directly with our miner constituents in these communities that the Enhanced Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Program is also being decimated. This program provides direct screening services via a mobile medical unit to miners at no cost. NIOSH also supports clinic sites where screening is done, so miners can understand if they are developing black lung or another condition and be as healthy as possible for themselves and their families.

¹ <https://ohsonline.com/Articles/2025/04/01/NIOSH.aspx>

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/rfk-jr-layoffs-hhs-niosh-worker-safety-agency/?linkId=787819828>

³ <https://www.post-gazette.com/business/career-workplace/2025/04/01/niosh-trump-doge-musk-mine-pittsburgh/stories/202504010086>

⁴ <https://wvmetronews.com/2025/04/02/hhs-laying-off-185-at-morgantown-niosh/>

Never has there been a more critical time to do this work. A 2023 study conducted jointly by researchers at NIOSH and at the University of Illinois Chicago found that coal miners in central Appalachia—Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky—were eight times more likely to die from respiratory diseases like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and black lung than American men who are not miners.⁵ Our constituents are getting more severe disease at younger ages in recent decades, and we might never had known that without the expertise of NIOSH’s work on coal miner health.

We require more than a fact sheet indicating these duties will be reorganized into an Administration for a Healthy America given the extensive cuts to personnel. In order for us to better understand how the same amount of work can be done with hundreds fewer individuals, please provide responses to the following questions by April 9, 2025:

1. How many HHS employees who work in offices that work on mining health and safety have been fired, put on administrative leave, accepted the deferred resignation program offer, or accepted the VERA/VSIP offer since January 20, 2025? Provide a complete breakdown by agency and position. For each category of employee at each agency, provide information on GS level and veteran status, and clearly state the justification for termination. Include employees who have since been reinstated or placed on administrative leave, noting that change in status. Please provide the latest data available.
2. How many HHS employees remain who work on mining health and safety? Please provide a complete breakdown by agency and position.
3. How many additional employees who work in offices that work on mining health and safety do you intend to fire following the announcement made on March 27, 2025?
4. Provide all analyses conducted prior to the reorganization and firings of HHS employees who work in offices that focus on mining safety and health to determine the immediate and long-term impact these firings will have on programs and activities that those employees are tasked with administering. In particular, provide all analyses relating to 1) ensuring statutory obligations will be met, and 2) the Coal Workers’ Health Surveillance Program.

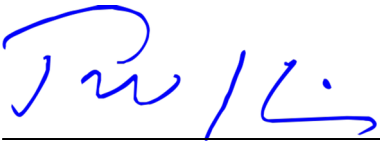
⁵ <https://virginiamercury.com/briefs/new-study-finds-central-appalachian-miners-at-highest-risk-of-dying-from-lung-diseases/>

Art Miller, an expert in mine air quality who has been working for NIOSH since 1996 and for its predecessor before this, was part of the Spokane-area firings. He noted that no one else does this kind of research and that “every worker in this country deserves to go home safe.”⁶ We agree, and urge you to reverse these cuts before it’s too late.

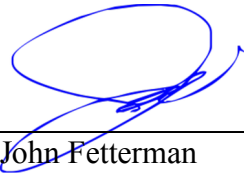
Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



John Fetterman
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

⁶ <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2025/apr/01/spokane-mining-safety-lab-closes-as-part-of-10000/>