

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC

June 6, 2025

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

RE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Sexually Transmitted Disease Laboratory

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We write to urge you reverse your decision to fire over 30 scientists at the National Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Reference Laboratory at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia. No other laboratory in the nation has the capabilities of this specialized STD laboratory at CDC. The functions of these employees are essential, and their duties are not performed at other federal agencies.

We note that despite repeated requests for information about reductions in force (RIF) that have affected these employees and approximately ten thousand others, we have learned of the removal of these employees through third parties, including in the media.¹ Your failure to respond to these requests for information improperly keeps the American people in the dark about activities at the agency. Additionally, we note that to our knowledge, CDC currently has no acting Director; therefore, we are sending this letter to you in your capacity as Secretary of the Department that contains CDC.²

CDC's STD Laboratory employees provide unique expertise, technological tools, and services to public health laboratories across the nation to confirm STD diagnosis for challenging cases, monitor trends, and respond quickly when an outbreak happens and when treatment fails. This work is crucial to clinicians, public health surveillance, and outbreak response efforts.

The laboratory's activities are authorized under Section 318 of the Public Health Service Act and serve "to provide technical assistance in the training and public health programs for the prevention and control of sexually transmitted diseases". This laboratory is one of three in the world that tracks drug-resistant STDs, and the only one in the U.S.^{3,4} It develops and publishes CDC laboratory recommendations in collaboration with STD experts to guide the nation's

¹ <https://www.statnews.com/2025/04/05/cdc-sexually-transmitted-diseases-laboratory-closed-by-trump-administration/>

² <https://www.statnews.com/2025/05/16/does-the-cdc-have-an-acting-director-yes-says-rfkjr/>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/21/syphilis-trump-cuts-cdc-doge>

⁴ <https://www.statnews.com/2025/04/05/cdc-sexually-transmitted-diseases-laboratory-closed-by-trump-administration/#:~:text=Until%20the%20Trump%20administration%20announced,are%20in%20Australia%20and%20Sweden>

laboratories and clinicians for STD testing and diagnosis.⁵ Additionally, the laboratory provided expert consultation for collaborative development of the CDC's 2021 sexually transmitted infections (STI) treatment guidelines, which serve as the clinical guidance for any patient care setting that supports those at risk of acquiring STIs.⁶ Furthermore, the laboratory maintains an extensive repository of samples and reference materials – including the world's largest collection of *N. gonorrhoeae* isolates and the most comprehensive surveillance data on gonococcal antimicrobial resistance patterns– with which CDC provides essential clinical guidance on treatment, and technical assistance to American public health laboratories, companies, and institutions to develop the most up-to-date diagnostics and treatment strategies.

The abrupt closure of this laboratory provided no time to inform public health partners of terminated services and collaborators of ongoing clinical studies. Millions of dollars' worth of highly specialized equipment and unique patient samples were left unattended. Requests for technical assistance and laboratory reference materials from the state and local public health laboratories are still coming in and are left unanswered because the STD Laboratory Reference and Research Branch scientists and subject matter experts were placed on administrative leave pending their termination in the RIF process.

The closure of this laboratory and cessation of its work leaves the U.S. unprepared for large STD outbreaks, and the health and safety of the public will suffer. During a time of record-high STD infections – with a total of over 2.4 million reported cases in 2023 – the consequences of dismantling the STD Laboratory are severe and irreversible.⁷ Laying off highly experienced and specialized CDC STD scientists and closing this key laboratory does not align with the CDC's core mission of preparing for and responding to epidemics and outbreaks.⁸ All these functions are crucial to clinicians, public health surveillance, and outbreak response efforts that save Americans' lives.

Please respond to the following questions no later than June 16, 2025:

- 1) Who is currently Acting Director at CDC?
- 2) Who made the decision to include the employees of the National STD Laboratory in the RIF at CDC?
- 3) Did CDC consult with state and local partners regarding their needs prior to beginning the RIF process? If so, please identify which public health agencies and other stakeholders were consulted.
- 4) What is the administration's plan for the isolates and other biological specimens held by the National STD Laboratory?
- 5) If the employees of CDC's National STD Laboratory are not reinstated, what is CDC's plan for the continuation of the work of the laboratory?
- 6) Has the administration identified a different laboratory within CDC to continue STD work?

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/rr/rr7301a1.htm>

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/default.htm>

⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov/sti-statistics/annual/index.html>

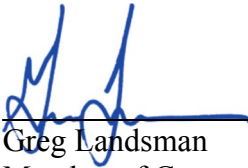
⁸ <https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-restructuring-doge-fact-sheet.html>

- 7) How many requests for technical assistance that would normally be handled by the National STD Laboratory has CDC received since RIF notices were issued to the laboratory's employees? How have these requests for technical assistance been addressed?
- 8) Has the administration conducted an impact analysis of the closure of this laboratory?

The work of the national STD Laboratory at CDC must continue to enable the swift identification and containment of sexually transmitted disease outbreaks and protect the health of US citizens. As such, you must restore the CDC STD Laboratory's important work and immediately reinstate all employees and contractors who have been impacted.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

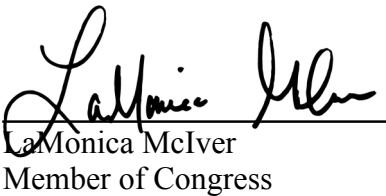
Sincerely,



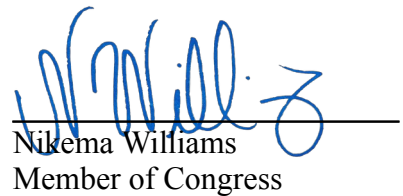
Greg Landsman
Member of Congress



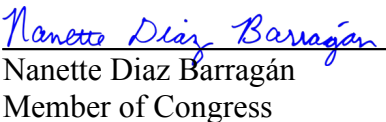
Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress



LaMonica McIver
Member of Congress



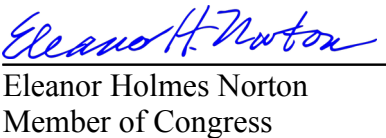
Nikema Williams
Member of Congress



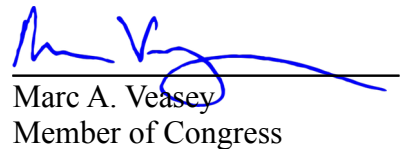
Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



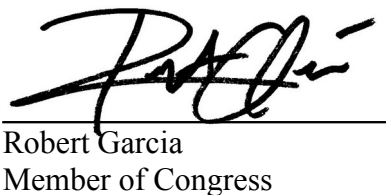
Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



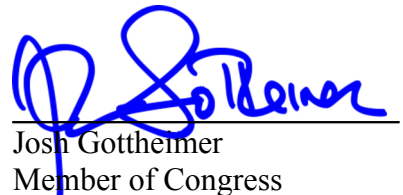
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Marc A. Veasey
Member of Congress



Robert Garcia
Member of Congress



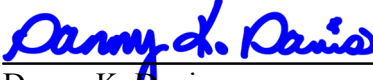
Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress



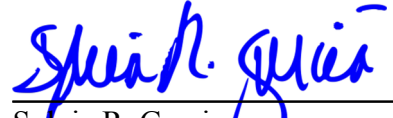
Jake Auchincloss
Member of Congress



Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress



Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress