

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 2, 2025

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

Dear Secretary,

I am writing with extreme concern and anger about your recent decision to lay off staff at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The reduction in force announcements at HHS yesterday are reckless and dangerous, are not based on any systematic review and will have profound negative consequences for the heroic survivors and first responders of 9/11 who are in need of health care due to illness developed as a result of their work in the days, weeks and months after that horrific attack on our nation.

I wrote to your office on February 17th, 2025 with concern about staff firings at the World Trade Center Health Program (WTCHP). While you ultimately and appropriately reinstated those employees, it was only after my public outcry as part of a bipartisan group of New York lawmakers. Additionally, your office did not respond to the letter I sent requesting more information, including a briefing, about the fate of the WTCHP and your plans to strengthen the program.

In our meeting prior to your confirmation as Secretary, you made an unequivocal commitment to working with me to strengthen this program. In your time in office you have fired staff not once, but twice, completely betraying what you said in our conversation and betraying the thousands of survivors of 9/11 who rely on the WTCHP for services.

This program is essential, providing critical screenings, services, research and medications to thousands of Americans - at zero cost - for 9/11-related health conditions and diseases. The regrettable actions that you have taken continue a pattern of callous decisions beginning in December 2024 when the incoming Trump Administration tanked the bipartisan health package that included permanent funding for the WTCHP. The repeated failure to fund this essential program and, now, the repeated firing of key employees at HHS demonstrates a lack of understanding of the importance of this program for our nation's heroes. Worse, it demonstrates a disturbing lack of concern to take care of those who answered the nation's call in a time of urgent need and now are suffering with illness because of it.

I ask for a response to this letter by Friday, April 4th. I call on you to promptly rehire the NIOSH staff essential to carrying out the WTCHP mission. I am also repeating my request for a briefing on the changes that have been made to the WTCHP and what plans you will take as Secretary to ensure the program can provide lifesaving care to current and future enrollees.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles E. Schumer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator