

PRESS RELEASE

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Unions Strongly Oppose Proposed HHS Workforce Reductions and Restructuring, Citing Critical Public Health Risks

[Atlanta, GA; Cincinnati, OH; Morgantown, WV; Pittsburgh, PA; Research Triangle Park, NC]
— **[March 27, 2025]** — The unions representing workers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are strongly opposing the sweeping changes announced today by Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. that aim to restructure the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). These changes include reducing HHS's workforce by 20,000 employees, consolidating divisions, and closing regional offices, with significant impacts on the CDC and other critical agencies.

Under the proposed restructuring, the HHS workforce would be reduced from 82,000 to 62,000 employees, and five regional offices would be closed. Secretary Kennedy claims that these actions are designed to make HHS more efficient and better able to address America's health challenges, but the unions representing the workers who make the department function believe these cuts will severely impair the agency's ability to protect public health. The CDC, which would lose approximately 2,400 employees, stands to be one of the hardest-hit agencies. At a time when the CDC's expertise in disease prevention, surveillance, and emergency response is critical, these reductions would drastically hinder its capacity to effectively tackle public health crises.

"The proposed workforce cuts and restructuring threaten to undermine the effectiveness of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in safeguarding the public health of the American people," said Yolanda Jacobs, President of AFGE Local 2883. "Reducing the number of public health professionals during a time of such uncertainty, especially in the face of ongoing challenges such as COVID-19, chronic diseases, and the mental health crisis, is a dangerous and irresponsible decision."

"CDC is crucial to strengthening the world's ability to prevent emergencies, detect new threats early, and respond rapidly and effectively when outbreaks occur," said Dorothy Roper, President of AFGE Local 2923.

One of the most concerning elements of the restructuring plan is the proposed move of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) out of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Union argues that NIOSH's work is essential for preventing the spread of communicable diseases that are often contracted in the workplace—especially in high-risk work environments like healthcare. By separating NIOSH from the CDC, the Unions warn that the nation will lose a critical connection between occupational health and public health, potentially hindering efforts to protect workers from exposure to airborne diseases, including COVID-19 and other communicable illnesses.

"Communicable diseases like tuberculosis, hepatitis, and influenza are occupational illnesses that disproportionately affect healthcare workers and other frontline employees," said Brendan Demich, Chief Steward of AFGE Local 1916. "NIOSH's work has been critical in ensuring that workers have the proper protection through research on things such as respirators and ventilation controls. Moving

NIOSH outside the CDC would disrupt this vital work, leaving workers more vulnerable to preventable harm.”

In addition to the NIOSH move, the Union also expressed concern over the broader restructuring plan, which involves centralizing core functions like communications, procurement, and human resources. While the intention may be to increase efficiency, the Union argues that such centralization could dilute the specialized expertise of agencies like the CDC, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), further weakening the department’s ability to protect public health.

The Union is calling on Congress to intervene and prevent these harmful cuts and restructuring, emphasizing that strengthening the workforce within HHS is critical to addressing the growing health challenges faced by the nation.

“It is not the fault of federal employees that the American quality of life is declining,” said Micah Niemeier-Walsh, Vice President of AFGE Local 3840. “We know that the root cause is the privatization of healthcare and the insurance companies profiting from our suffering. To blame dedicated public servants for the problems caused by these profit-driven corporations is both misguided and inappropriate. No amount of restructuring and reducing the public health workforce will improve the health of Americans if the root cause of their declining health is not addressed.”

“The American people deserve a fully equipped and effective health department—one that is prepared to respond to the next public health crisis, protect workers from communicable diseases, and continue to support the most vulnerable members of society,” Micah Niemeier-Walsh concluded. “We will continue to stand in solidarity with all HHS workers and public health advocates, and the American people, in opposing these detrimental actions.”

About the AFGE Locals

AFGE Locals 3840, 2883, 2923, 3430, and 1916 represent workers across CDC, advocating for the rights, safety, and well-being of its members. The Unions are dedicated to ensuring that public health agencies remain fully funded, adequately staffed, and able to effectively serve the American people.

AFGE 3840 represents employees at NIOSH in Cincinnati, OH.
AFGE 2883 represents employees at CDC in Atlanta, GA
AFGE 2923 represents employees at CDC in Research Triangle Park, NC
AFGE 3430 represents employees at NIOSH in Morgantown, WV
AFGE 1916 represents employees at NIOSH in Pittsburgh, PA & Spokane, WA

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