

April 7, 2025

The Honorable William Cassidy, Chair
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders, Ranking Member
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
332 Dirksen Building,
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Restructuring of HHS’s environmental health agencies

Senators Cassidy and Sanders;

The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) represents more than 7,100 governmental, private, academic, and uniformed services sector environmental health professionals in the U.S., its territories, and internationally. NEHA is the profession’s strongest advocate for excellence in the practice of environmental health as it delivers on its mission to build, sustain, and empower an effective environmental health workforce.

On behalf of the environmental health profession and members of NEHA, I am expressing the grave concerns that the reorganizations and reductions in force (RIFs) will have on the state, local, tribal and territorial (SLTT) environmental health agencies in this country.

Last week, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced a [dramatic restructuring](#) in accordance with President Trump's Executive Order, “[Implementing the President’s ‘Department of Government Efficiency’ Workforce Optimization Initiative.](#)”

This order has dramatic and unknown implications for the state & local environmental health agencies. The foremost federal programs regarding environmental health impacted by this EO include the CDC’s National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR).

State, local, tribal and territorial environmental health agencies perform the services necessary for every community to thrive in this country. These agencies ensure our food is safe, our water is drinkable, the air is breathable and wastewater is eliminated. These agencies provide the fundamental services required for active and sanitary communities that are attractive for businesses and residents.

The federal government funds, mainly through CDC’s NCEH, research and workforce development that supports these state and local environmental health agencies efforts to combat emerging and continuing environmental health threats.

CDC’s NCEH performs vital research and funds the state & local environmental health agencies, including:

- **Enhancements to the Environmental Health Workforce & Environmental Public Health Workforce Development** - Environmental health is profoundly local. The majority of the activities to protect the public from environmental threats are undertaken by the local environmental health workforce.

CDC's NCEH invests in the environmental health workforce through workforce development, data modernization, recruitment and training.

- **Food Safety & Foodborne Outbreaks** - CDC's NCEH invests in state & local environmental health departments by strengthening foodborne illness outbreak investigations skills and capacity, as well as promoting enteric disease surveillance and response activities.
- **Assisting residences served by Private Drinking Water** - Research conducted by CDC's NCEH identifies recent waterborne disease threats (such as PFAS), providing state & local agencies the necessary information on how private water users can reduce health threats from these diseases.
- **Rural Public Health Training Curriculum** - Rural America lacks the resources necessary to recruit and train talent. CDC's NCEH invests in training in rural public health competencies for the environmental health workforce.

Elimination of CDC's NCEH will lead to:

- **Loss of Critical Funding** – CDC's NCEH strengthens state and local environmental health capacity to prevent and respond to environmental hazards. Without CDC funding, states and localities will face challenges in detecting, preventing, and responding to environmental health threats, leading to increased risks of waterborne diseases, foodborne outbreaks, and other public health crises.
- **Adverse Public Health Consequences:** The loss of capacity by environmental health programs will result in slower responses to toxic exposures, unsafe drinking water, food contamination, and other environmental-related health threats such as extreme heat, flooding, and wildfires. Communities at great risk of environmental health exposures and hazards will face increased illness, hospitalizations, and long-term health effects.

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)

ATSDR is the lead federal public health agency responsible for protecting communities from harmful health effects of natural and man-made hazardous substances released into the environment. ATSDR provides:

- **24/7 expertise and site-specific support** in response to health concerns during emergencies involving environmental hazards and releases of hazardous materials.
- **Funds states and communities** to investigate and respond to harmful exposures in communities, and inform the public about exposure prevention, through ATSDR's Partnership to Promote Local Efforts to Reduce Environmental Exposure (APPLETREE) Program. ATSDR awarded over \$12 million to 30 state health departments for fiscal year 2023.
- **Conducts thorough exposure investigations, health consultations, and data-driven assessments** of possible health effects faced by communities living near Superfund sites.

Investments into environmental health by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services ensures a healthy nation. CDC's National Center for Environmental Health and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry provide the research and resources necessary for the state & local environmental health agencies to perform their mission of protecting the public from environmental harms.

Continued support for these programs and all the environmental health programs HHS funds will lead to a healthier America.

In health,





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NEHA Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer

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CC: Members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee

Senator Rand Paul, KY

Senator Susan Collins, ME

Senator Lisa Murkowski, AK

Senator Markwayne Mullin, OK

Senator Roger Marshall, KS

Senator Tim Scott, SC

Senator Josh Hawley, MO

Senator Tommy Tuberville, AL

Senator Jim Banks, IN

Senator Jon Husted, OH

Senator Ashley Moody, FL

Senator Patty Murray, WA

Senator Tammy Baldwin, WI

Senator Christopher Murphy, CT

Senator Tim Kaine, VA

Senator Maggie Hassan, NH

Senator John Hickenlooper, CO

Senator Ed Markey, MA

Senator Andy Kim, NJ

Senator Lisa Blunt Rochester, DE

Senator Angela Alsobrooks, MD

