

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 27, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We are deeply alarmed by the recent firings at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), an agency under your jurisdiction at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Without cause, HHS terminated 125 employees, further decimating the agency that is a critical first responder on the frontlines of our nation's ongoing substance use and mental health crises. The firings that took place on October 10, 2025, were on top of the hundreds of people HHS fired in April, leaving SAMHSA at about half the staff it had in January. The firing of key staff at this agency threatens to undermine years of hard-won progress on the opioid crisis, and could not come at a worse time.

Right now, communities across the country – in both red and blue states – continue to face record overdose deaths and escalating rates of mental health conditions and substance use disorder. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there were 73,690 overdose deaths from April 2024 to April 2025. The opioid epidemic remains an ongoing public health emergency in the United States. In addition, youth suicide rates have risen by over 60% to all-time highs, and one in five Americans live with a mental health condition. Now more than ever, the federal government must be strengthening all efforts to respond to these dual crises, in addition to cracking down on the influx of illicit fentanyl into our country.

It is important to highlight that SAMHSA's programs not only save lives, they save money. Mental illness and substance use already cost the U.S. economy more than \$1 trillion each year in lost productivity, health care spending, and premature deaths. Terminating the experts at SAMHSA who coordinate our national response will deepen both the human and economic toll and ensure devastating impacts from increasing supplies of illicit drugs flowing into communities across the country.

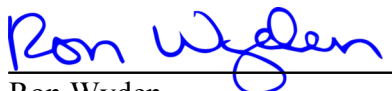
For years, SAMHSA has been a cornerstone of America's public health response; implementing evidence-based solutions, expanding access to key services in rural and underserved areas, and launching critical tools like 9-8-8, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. These efforts enjoy broad bipartisan support, delivering real results on a crisis that transcends party lines.

Your decision sends the wrong message to public health professionals—and to the families counting on them. It contradicts the administration's own stated goals to tackle the fentanyl crisis, expand mental health services, and end the opioid epidemic. Terminating staff risks derailing the progress made by a workforce whose experience is irreplaceable.

We have seen your agency course-correct before, reversing similar mass terminations at the CDC. That same logic must apply here. The administration should be bolstering SAMHSA's mission, not undercutting it.

The public expects a health department that's focused on solutions, not politics. I urge you to reverse these terminations immediately and reaffirm your department's commitment to the people on the ground doing the hard work to keep Americans safe and healthy.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



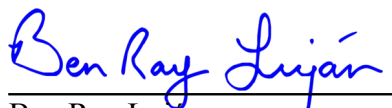
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



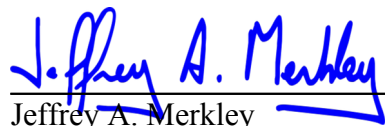
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



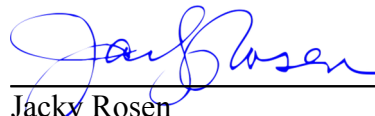
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Tina Smith
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Richard Blumenthal
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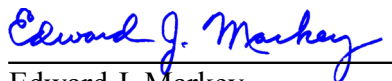
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