

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 5, 2025

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

We write to ask that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigate the impact of the recent firings of probationary federal workers on the health and safety of Americans. Over recent weeks, the Trump Administration has fired at least 25,000 federal employees.¹ Despite the copy-pasted language in many agencies' termination letters citing "poor performance," probationary employees appear to have been terminated in indiscriminate batches, regardless of their individual performance.²

Thousands of the fired workers were responsible for protecting Americans' health and safety, including in the following areas:

- ***Air travel:*** About 400 Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) staff were fired, including those who work on safety inspection teams, ensure pilots are medically fit to fly, monitor flight paths for hazards, and address maintenance issues at air traffic control towers.³ They were terminated within a month of the deadliest air carrier accident in the United States in decades.⁴ Over 200 employees at the Transportation Security Administration

¹ Government Executive, "RIF watch: See which agencies are laying off federal workers," GovExec Staff, updated March 3, 2025, <https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2025/02/rif-watch-see-which-agencies-are-laying-federal-workers/403342/>; Bloomberg, "Trump's Mass Firings of Federal Workers Spread Chaos Nationwide," Courtney Rozen, February 24, 2025, <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/daily-labor-report/trumps-mass-firings-of-federal-workers-spread-chaos-nationwide>; CNN, "Tracking Trump's overhaul of the federal workforce," Annette Choi, Alex Leeds Matthews, Danya Gainor and Amy O'Kruk, March 4, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/politics/tracking-federal-workforce-firings-dg/index.html>.

² The Guardian, "Trump administration's mass firings could leave federal government with 'monumental' bill, say experts," Michael Sainato, February 21, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/21/trump-mass-firings-federal-government-bill>.

³ Associated Press, "Some of the 400 jobs that were cut at the FAA helped support air safety, a union says," Tara Copp, February 19, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/faa-firings-trump-doge-safety-airlines-27390c6a7aac58063652302df5a243d3>; RollingStone, "Trump and Elon's 'Pointless Bloodbath' at the FAA Is Even Worse Than You Think," Asawin Suebsaeng, Tim Dickinson, and Andrew Perez, February 21, 2025, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/trump-elon-musk-faa-air-planes-pointless-bloodbath-1235274324/>.

⁴ Axios, "D.C. plane crash is among country's deadliest in decades," Sareen Habeshian, January 30, 2025, <https://www.axios.com/2025/01/30/plane-crash-deadliest-charted>.

(TSA) were also fired, undermining the agency's ability to screen passengers and baggage to ensure safe air travel.⁵

- **Floods & wildfires:** Over 6,000 employees at the Department of Interior, U.S. Forest Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and National Park Service were fired.⁶ Many worked in offices responsible for mitigating the risk of floods, wildfires, and other extreme weather events⁷ — which killed hundreds of Americans in 2024 alone.⁸ The employees were fired within months of North Carolina's worst flood in a century and one of the most damaging wildfires in California's history.⁹ Meanwhile, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which provides Americans with emergency aid following disasters, faced a cut of more than 200 workers.¹⁰ Additionally, some of terminated staff were responsible for search-and-rescue operations at National Parks.¹¹
- **Infectious diseases & chronic health conditions:** About 5,200 employees at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) were fired.¹² That included around 750 workers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), compromising the agency's work to combat the rising number of bird flu cases in humans and a surging

⁵ USA Today, "More than 200 TSA employees fired in Trump's push to cut federal workforce," Joey Garrison, February 20, 2025, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2025/02/20/tsa-trump-workers-fired/79307363007/>.

⁶ NBC News, "Trump job cuts could throw national parks and forests into 'staffing chaos,'" Alicia Victoria Lozano and Evan Bush, February 20, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/trump-job-cuts-throw-national-parks-forests-staffing-chaos-rcna192803>; The Hill, "Interior Department fires 2,300 employees after OPM directive," Rachel Frazin, February 14, 2025, <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/5145945-interior-department-fires-probationary-employees/>; CNN, "Trump officials fire 800 employees at weather forecasting and oceans agency," Ella Nilsen and Tami Luhby, February 28, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/27/politics/noaa-federal-workers-firings/index.html>; Forbes, "Where Federal Workers Are Being Laid Off," Katharina Buchholz, February 20, 2025, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/katharinabuchholz/2025/02/20/where-federal-workers-are-being-laid-off/>.

⁷ See, e.g., Associated Press, "How Trump's mass layoffs raise the risk of wildfires in the US West, according to fired workers," Martha Bellisle and Claire Rush, February 21, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/fired-federal-workers-wildfires-season-trump-west-d915e8ea272b7265912d7eafdbf7420a>; WGBH, "Trump administration layoffs hit NOAA, agency that forecasts weather, hurricanes," Alejandra Borunda, Michael Copley, Lauren Sommer, Hansi Lo Wang, February 28, 2025, <https://www.wgbh.org/news/national/2025-02-28/trump-administration-layoffs-hit-noaa-agency-that-forecasts-weather-hurricanes>.

⁸ Climate.gov, "2024: An active year of U.S. billion-dollar weather and climate disasters," Adam B. Smith, January 10, 2025, <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/blogs/beyond-data/2024-active-year-us-billion-dollar-weather-and-climate-disasters>.

⁹ PBS News, "Crisis unfolds in the Southeast as Helene's death toll climbs to more than 100," September 30, 2024, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/crisis-unfolds-in-the-southeast-as-helenes-death-toll-nears-100>; TIME, "How the Los Angeles Fires Compare to Historic Wildfires," Solcyré Burga, January 17, 2025, <https://time.com/7207852/los-angeles-wildfires-history/>.

¹⁰ The Washington Post, "FEMA is losing scores of employees. What does that mean for disaster recovery?," Brianna Sacks, Hannah Natanson, and Ruby Mellen, February 18, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2025/02/18/fema-layoffs-disaster-response/>.

¹¹ ABC News, "How national parks and forests could suffer as a result of federal firings," Julia Jacobo and Megan Forrester, February 25, 2025, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/national-parks-suffer-result-federal-firings/story?id=119124480>.

¹² Associated Press, "HHS is losing thousands of workers under Trump administration probationary job cuts," Mike Stobbe and Carla K. Johnson, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-job-cuts-health-cdc-0d002fd6f528a7b91ced79628bf68196>.

measles outbreak.¹³ The firings also impacted over 1,000 employees at the National Institutes of Health, which researches emerging life-saving treatments for cancer and other diseases.¹⁴ An unknown number of individuals at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) — which oversees health coverage and services for more than 160 million women, children, elderly individuals, and families who receive health care through the Medicare and Medicaid programs, the Children’s Health Insurance Program, and the Affordable Care Act Marketplaces — were also fired.¹⁵

- ***Nuclear safety:*** The firings initially impacted 177 workers at the National Nuclear Security Administration, which ensures the safety and security of the country’s nuclear stockpile.¹⁶ This included some of the few Americans with expertise on nuclear weapons and nuclear safety,¹⁷ agents in the Office of Secure Transportation “responsible for the safe and secure transport of government-owned special nuclear materials,”¹⁸ and an official “responsible for maintaining plans to minimize the effects of a nuclear accident on site and in surrounding areas.”¹⁹ The Trump Administration later reversed course, but one fired and rehired employee predicted “that the work of the nuclear agency is likely to slow as a result.”²⁰

¹³ CBS News, “CDC’s ‘disease detectives’ apparently spared in DOGE cuts at health agencies,” Alexander Tin, February 20, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cdc-disease-detectives-doge-cuts-health-agencies/>; Public Health Newswire, “Firing of federal workers endangers public health,” Natalie McGill, February 18, 2025, <http://publichealthnewswire.org/?p=federal-public-health-firings>; Reuters, “Trump administration’s NIH layoffs total 1,165 people, internal email shows,” Ahmed Aboulenein, February 16, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-administration-lays-off-fda-employees-stat-news-reports-2025-02-16/>; NPR, “Health agencies lose staff members in key areas as Trump firings set in,” Will Stone and Pien Huang, February 17, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/02/17/nx-s1-5300052/federal-employees-layoffs-cdc-nih-fda>.

¹⁴ Reuters, “Trump administration’s NIH layoffs total 1,165 people, internal email shows,” Ahmed Aboulenein, February 16, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-administration-lays-off-fda-employees-stat-news-reports-2025-02-16/>.

¹⁵ STAT News, “Medicare and Medicaid agency faces compromised functions and disruption from Trump’s firings,” Bob Herman, March 1, 2025, <https://www.statnews.com/2025/03/01/federal-employees-cms-layoffs-complicate-trump-promise-medicare-medicaid/>.

¹⁶ Letter from Teresa M. Robbins, Acting Under Secretary for Nuclear Security and Administrator, to Senator Elizabeth Warren, February 21, 2025, on file with the Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren; CNN, “Trump officials fired nuclear staff not realizing they oversee the country’s weapons stockpile, sources say,” Rene Marsh and Ella Nilsen, February 14, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/14/climate/nuclear-nnsa-firings-trump/index.html>.

¹⁷ CNN, “Trump officials struggled to reinstate nuclear weapons staff after firing hundreds” Rene Marsh and Ella Nilsen, February 18, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/17/climate/trump-nnsa-nuclear-staff-reinstated/index.html>.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Energy, “Office of Secure Transportation,” <https://www.energy.gov/nnsa/office-secure-transportation#:~:text=The%20Office%20of%20Secure%20Transportation,%2C%20enriched%20uranium%2C%20or%20plutonium.>

¹⁹ The Bulwark, “Inside DOGE’s Dumbest Cut Yet,” William Kristol, Andrew Egger, and Benjamin Parker, February 21, 2025, <https://www.thebulwark.com/p/inside-doges-dumbest-cut-yet>.

²⁰ WUSF, “After mass layoffs, some federal agencies are trying to bring employees back,” Rachel Treisman, February 21, 2025, <https://www.wusf.org/2025-02-21/after-mass-layoffs-some-federal-agencies-are-trying-to-bring-employees-back>.

- **Veterans' healthcare and benefits:** Over 2,400 employees at Veterans' Affairs (VA) were fired, including those who provided veterans with emergency services via a suicide crisis hotline and who served veterans in intensive care units.²¹
- **Food safety:** Over 4,000 employees at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) were terminated²² — including workers who fight bird flu outbreaks in dairy cattle, which have contributed to soaring egg prices, and those who study pests to mitigate risks to the nation's food supply.²³
- **Opioid epidemic:** Over 10 percent of workers at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) have been terminated.²⁴ The agency is critical to the federal government's response to the opioid epidemic, including through distributing funding and guidance on managing overdoses.²⁵

These are just some of the many examples of terminated workers who protected the country's health and safety.²⁶

The Trump Administration has since called some of the firings an “accident” and scrambled to rehire certain workers — including individuals focused on the bird flu outbreak, nuclear security, veterans' health, and health services in Tribal communities.²⁷ However, as of now, the agencies have not been able to rehire all of those workers and continue to face critical workforce shortages²⁸ — underscoring the damage of the Administration's indiscriminate approach. Rather

²¹ Military.com, “VA Crisis Line Employees Among Those Fired Amid Federal Workforce Purge,” Patricia Kime, February 19, 2025, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/02/19/va-crisis-line-employees-among-those-fired-amid-federal-workforce-purge.html>; USA Today, “1,400 more VA employees laid off in Trump's latest purge of federal workers,” Cybele Mayes-Osterman and Swapna Venugopal Ramaswamy, February 25, 2025, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2025/02/25/more-layoffs-veterans-department/80303826007/>.

²² New York Times, “Agriculture Department Moves to Rehire Some Bird Flu Response Workers,” Emily Anthes, February 20, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/20/us/politics/bird-flu-fired-workers.html>.

²³ Politico, “Trump administration firings hit key office handling bird flu response,” Marica Brown, February 16, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/16/trump-administration-firings-bird-flu-response-00204542>; The New York Times, “Mass Federal Firings May Imperil Crops, Cattle and Pets,” Emily Anthes and Apoorva Mandavilli, February 26, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/26/science/trump-plant-animal-health.html>.

²⁴ CBS News, “Mental health agency loses 1 in 10 staffers to DOGE cuts, 988 hotline team impacted,” Alexander Tin, February 21, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/samhsa-mental-health-agency-doge-job-cuts-988-hotline/>.

²⁵ *Id.*; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, “Treatment Resources for Opioid Use Disorder,” https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/opioid_overdose_prevention_toolkit_and_opioid_resources_flyer.pdf.

²⁶ NPR, “Health agencies lose staff members in key areas as Trump firings set in,” Will Stone and Pien Huang, February 17, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/02/17/nx-s1-5300052/federal-employees-layoffs-cdc-nih-fda>; The Guardian, “‘I feel betrayed’: federal health workers fired by Trump tell of ‘nightmare,’” Melody Schreiber, February 20, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/20/trump-fired-health-employees>.

²⁷ USA Today, “You're ...rehired? What we know about who is exempt from Donald Trump's mass firings,” Erin Mansfield and Sarah D. Wire, February 21, 2025, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2025/02/21/trump-rescinded-layoffs/79188799007/>; NBC News, “USDA says it accidentally fired officials working on bird flu and is now trying to rehire them,” Allan Smith, Melanie Zanova, and Lauren Strickler, February 18, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/doge/usda-accidentally-fired-officials-bird-flu-rehire-rcna192716>.

²⁸ Our Today, “Fired and rehired – the dizzying confusion of Trump's government overhaul,” February 21, 2025, <https://our.today/fired-and-rehired-the-dizzying-confusion-of-trumps-government-overhaul/>; NPR, “After mass layoffs, some federal agencies are trying to bring employees back,” Rachel Treisman, February 21, 2025,

than make government more efficient, these firings appear to have created massive inefficiencies and put the American people at risk.

As the Administration continues to implement its “plans for large-scale reductions in force,”²⁹ we anticipate additional rounds of mass layoffs of the federal government’s over 200,000 probationary workers.³⁰ We also anticipate that the Administration may seek to privatize functions that had been performed by fired workers. Already, private companies — including some owned by or connected to Elon Musk and other Trump officials³¹ — have begun entering agencies following mass terminations. Unlike the federal government, those companies are not responsible for prioritizing Americans’ health and safety interests, and we are concerned that they will not do so.

Congress and the public need to better understand the full impact of these terminations on our health and safety, given that the Administration and Musk clearly do not. GAO’s investigation should answer the following questions:

1. How many probationary workers whose duties related to each of the following functions have been fired: national security (including cybersecurity and nuclear security), transportation safety, food safety, disease control, other physical health, natural disaster prevention and response, and any other essential health or safety functions that GAO identifies. For each category:
 - a. Please provide a full description of the responsibilities of probationary workers terminated.
 - b. How many of the employees had more than two years of federal service?
 - c. How many of the probationary employees were veterans, military spouses, documented members of the Guard or Reserves, or any combination thereof?
2. To the extent that agencies fired employees then attempted to hire them back upon realization that their services were essential, how successful were they in doing so?
3. What percentage of the terminated employees’ roles have been refilled? Please disaggregate by whether the same employee or a new employee filled the role.
4. To what extent is the agency still performing the function previously performed by the terminated worker(s)?
 - a. Please describe any ways in which the function has been compromised.

<https://www.npr.org/2025/02/21/nx-s1-5304152/federal-government-layoffs-reversed>.

²⁹ White House, “Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Works to Remake America’s Federal Workforce,” press release, February 11, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/02/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-works-to-remake-americas-federal-workforce/>.


³⁰ Government Executive, “Federal agencies are still firing probationary employees—most recently NOAA,” February 14, 2025, <https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2025/02/see-which-federal-agencies-are-firing-new-hires/403033/>; NPR, “Trump’s spending cuts target probationary workers. What does the status mean?,” Emma Bowman, February 15, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/02/15/nx-s1-5298182/trumps-probationary-workers-federal>.


³¹ Trellis, “DOGE-directed layoffs at DOE could benefit the private sector,” Leah Garden, February 20, 2025, <https://trellis.net/article/doge-directed-layoffs-at-doe-could-benefit-the-private-sector/>; Wired, “These Are the SpaceX Engineers Already Working Inside the FAA,” Vittoria Elliot and Aarian Marshall, February 19, 2025, <https://www.wired.com/story/faa-doge-elon-musk-space-x/>.


- b. How long had that function been performed by the agency?
 - c. Has the agency moved toward privatizing any of the relevant functions?
5. If the terminations resulted in the agency ceasing or altering that function, how has that change in the agency's work affected Americans' health or safety? Please provide any early data or other indicators of the impact.
 6. What cost analysis was performed to justify these removals and how accurate were those assessments?
 7. Did the terminations result in increased spending, including on contractors?
 8. Did agencies assess whether any replacements for probationary employees were contractors performing inherently governmental functions?

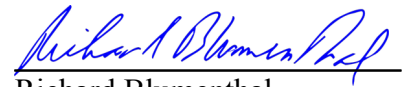
We thank you for your attention to this important matter.

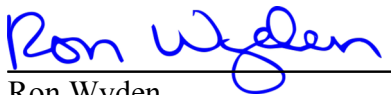
Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator


Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator


Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator


Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator


Ron Wyden
United States Senator


Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

C. A. Booker

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator