

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 15, 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 write regarding reports of sweeping firings at the Administration for Children & Families (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). You purport to be a champion for children, and even posted on X “[w]hen people ask what motivates me, my answer is always the same...our children.”¹ But, just 47 days after your confirmation as Secretary of HHS, you oversaw mass firings at ACF that make every child in America less safe than they were the day before.

ACF provides services and supports to low-income and middle-class children, families, workers, and communities. Recently, more than 500 civil servants were fired across ACF program offices alongside tens of thousands of other HHS employees, many of whom regularly collaborate on cross-cutting initiatives with ACF. There has been no specific HHS communication about the ACF firings, however, it is safe to conclude that agency cuts of this scale will compromise the well-being of children and families nationwide.

When Finance Committee and Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee staff reached out for urgent clarity in follow-up to an unanswered request regarding previous ACF firings, they received no substantive information. As with any major restructuring any federal agency undertakes, there should be significant, advanced planning to minimize service disruptions and maintain quality administration of programs. ACF’s inability to provide immediate, comprehensive information to authorizing Committees on the recent firings raises serious transparency concerns and doubts regarding whether HHS has adequate plans in place.

The Office of Family Assistance, Office of Community Services, Office of Child Care, Office of Child Support Services, and Children’s Bureau are reportedly impacted by these firings. ACF also closed five of its ten regional offices in Chicago, New York, Seattle, San Francisco, and Boston. These offices served 22 states that are home to almost 165 million Americans.² Regional offices serve as the eyes and ears of ACF by providing on-the-ground, specialized technical support to a geographic region and its grantees. Regional offices also review and approve state plans and cost allocation plans. Without these plans, states cannot receive Congressional funding or be reimbursed for funding that supports multiple programs.

One of the most troubling areas of ACF staffing terminations is the complete elimination of the Division of State Systems within the Children’s Bureau. With the elimination of this Division,

¹ @RobertKennedyJr, *When people ask what motivates me, my answer is always the same ... our children.* #Kennedy24 (Oct. 15, 2023) <https://x.com/RobertKennedyJr/status/1713666860829253923>.

² The 22 states are: Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.

you have *knowingly endangered children*. This entity was responsible for overseeing the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS), which is the electronic case management system for child abuse and neglect monitoring. Case workers and child welfare professionals rely on this vital system for real-time information sharing that supports the safety and well-being of vulnerable children. CCWIS includes information on child and family histories, services recommended and delivered, eligibility information, outcomes, and more. The loss of CCWIS impedes state child welfare agencies' ability to effectively serve children and prevent child abuse and neglect.

At a time when child care is unaffordable and hard to find, it is unacceptable that ACF has gutted the Office of Child Care and the Office of Head Start. The closure of regional offices will have particularly severe consequences, as these offices have deep expertise to support the administration of the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) and Head Start programs that are unique to the state and local communities they serve. These closures will result in less safe, more expensive, and harder-to-find child care options for millions of children across the country as well as reduce the capacity for Head Start programs to effectively and efficiently serve low-income children in their communities.

According to reports, much of the staff at the Office of Community Services was dismissed, including the entire Division of Social Services, and over half of all employees at the Office of Family Assistance were laid off. These two offices are responsible for administering Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG), respectively. By eliminating these offices, you have not only *knowingly endangered children and older adults*, you have also *threatened access to stable, healthy meals for at-risk seniors and affordable child care for working families*.

ACF also reportedly terminated every single employee at the Office of Community Services administering the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which helps over 6 million people cover the cost of their heating and cooling bills. It is now unclear how unspent LIHEAP funding will be administered, and we are deeply concerned that children, seniors, and working families will be left without assistance for heating and cooling their homes as a result of your actions.

TANF is one of the nation's largest anti-poverty programs for low-income families with children, while SSBG is a key funding source of adult and child protective services, child care, Head Start, Meals on Wheels, case management, adoption services, foster care services, substance use disorder treatment, and more. This means there is no one left to support the states and territories in administering vital programs, and it is unclear who will conduct oversight of the program moving forward. Furthermore, many staff involved in TANF program integrity were included in the Office of Family Assistance layoffs, raising serious questions about HHS's sincerity in its "commitment" to rooting out fraud, waste, and abuse.

The gutting of the Office of Family Assistance and the Office of Community Services raises acute concerns as Republicans threaten to *eliminate* essential human service programs for children, seniors, and families to fund tax breaks for billionaires and wealthy corporations. Deep cuts to TANF and full elimination of SSBG are included in the Republican wish list of trillions

of dollars in cuts to health care, nutrition, child care, and more for millions of families.³ We are deeply concerned you are intentionally teeing-up Congressional Republicans' steep cuts to TANF and SSBG by eliminating the career public servants who make sure states and territories effectively and efficiently administer this funding dedicated to our most vulnerable children, families, and seniors.

These mass firings come on the heels of previous workforce purges at ACF. Under the direction of Elon Musk's so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), ACF dismissed its probationary employees, or a significant portion of its workforce. One office that was particularly hard hit by the HHS probationary employee purge was the Unaccompanied Children Office of the Ombuds. Because this was a new entity, most employees, including the Ombuds, were still within their probationary period. These arbitrary firings already endangered children, seniors, and at-risk communities by hindering ACF's ability to operate with a full and qualified workforce. The recent additional dismissals will further diminish ACF's ability to provide a full array of services to low-income children and families.

These steep layoffs are also paired with an increase in responsibilities for ACF. On March 27, HHS announced that the Administration for Community Living (ACL) would be dissolved and subsumed into multiple other agencies, including ACF, representing yet another deeply misguided management decision.⁴ HHS has provided absolutely no justification or other assurance that ACF can take on these additional, essential responsibilities without harming the rights of people with disabilities of all ages. We can only conclude *children will bear the brunt of these cuts and suffer*.

In the last three months, ACF's staffing footprint has been reduced by between 35 to 40 percent. Please provide our staff with a comprehensive briefing on these ACF layoffs by the end of the week and a written response to the questions below no later than one week after (by April 25, 2025).

1. How many ACF employees have been fired since January 20, 2025? Please provide a complete breakdown by office and position. For each category of employee at each office, provide information on GS level and veteran status, and clearly state the justification for termination. This accounting should include employees who have since been reinstated or placed on administrative leave, noting that change in status.
2. Which officials at HHS were involved in these staffing reduction decisions and what planning, if any, was undertaken prior to these reductions? Please describe the events that unfolded and name each office that was involved in the decision. Further, please name the official(s) who approved the staffing reductions as well as specifically indicate if any of the below individuals, or direct reports to these individuals, were involved in the decision-making. Name any such direct reports.

³ Rep. Jodey Arrington, *Spending Reform Options* (Jan. 17, 2025) <https://www.politico.com/f/?id=00000194-5115-d639-a395-7db5d6b70000>.

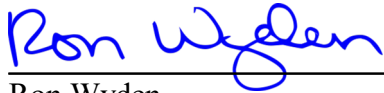
⁴ HHS Press Office, *HHS Announces Transformation to Make America Healthy Again* (Mar. 27, 2025) <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/hhs-restructuring-doge.html>.

- a. Elon Musk, Special Government Employee, DOGE.
 - b. Amy Gleason, Acting Administrator, DOGE.
 - c. Andrew Gradison, Acting Assistant Secretary, ACF.
3. Please provide a detailed plan for how the Administration plans to staff and oversee ACF going forward, and how you will ensure continued execution of its critical mission.
 - a. Please describe how ACF plans to monitor the impact that these dismissals have on its programs and services moving forward.
4. Please describe how ACF will oversee states and territories in administering SSBG without the Division of Social Services.
5. Please describe how the Children's Bureau will oversee the CCWIS moving forward, including how it will ensure that it retains the in-house expertise to conduct this technical work.
6. The Administration recently canceled five bipartisan TANF pilots designed to help the anti-poverty program focus on better promoting meaningful employment opportunities. How will ACF re-bid those pilots, as announced, with these new workforce reductions?
7. Please describe how the Administration made decisions to close half of the ACF regional offices, including the information and planning used to decide which and how many of these offices would be closed.
 - a. Who at the HHS Office of Child Care and Office of Head Start will be monitoring and supporting states and Head Start grantees across the regions without offices?
 - b. Who will help Head Start programs navigate federal policy guidance and provide training and technical assistance?
 - c. Who will be conducting visits and on-the-ground oversight of child health and safety and program quality for CCDF funding and Head Start programs?
 - d. How will the Administration ensure timely communication and notices of awards for upcoming Head Start grant cycles, including the May 1 deadline, given the reduced staffing capacity and expertise?
8. Please provide specific staffing information on who is administering LIHEAP and describe how ACF will oversee states and territories in administering this program in a way that will ensure no family loses access to critical utility assistance.
9. Congress just passed the bipartisan reauthorization of Title IV-B of the Social Security Act. The law requires HHS to reduce the administrative burden experienced by state child welfare agencies by a minimum of 15 percent. How will reduced ACF staff impact states' ability to meet this statutory requirement, including with respect to ACF's ability to provide timely technical assistance and support states?
10. The Family First Prevention Services Act was a major bipartisan priority signed into law by Donald Trump in 2018 which aims to reduce entry into foster care, help children remain at home, and minimize reliance on unnecessary congregate care placement. Its implementation relies on the expertise of ACF staff. How will firings impact the

implementation of critical FFPSA provisions, including the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse and those related to Qualified Residential Treatment Programs?

11. As ACL is subsumed into ACF and other HHS agencies, how will HHS guarantee that children with disabilities and their families continue to receive access to coordinated services that help them live independently in their own communities, as they received via ACL? Please provide a detailed plan outlining the number of employees who remain at ACF, or who will be transferred from ACL to ACF, who will be able to provide the expertise needed to support children with disabilities.
12. Please describe how budget reconciliation priorities factored into ACF dismissal decisions, including any coordination with Congressional Republicans that took place related to which ACF offices to target.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Finance



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions