

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 16, 2025

Lee Zeldin
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Zeldin:

We are deeply concerned about reports that the Environmental Protection Agency plans to implement another Reduction in Force (RIF), possibly tied to the government shutdown, that would further shrink its workforce beyond the substantial losses already sustained this year.

Acting Chief Financial Officer Gregg Trembl's letter of May 2nd notified the Committees of the intent to reorganize several offices within the Agency. In the absence of responses to our questions since about these plans, months of delay in scheduling briefings and otherwise obtaining information, and the abrupt cancellation of our planned October 7th briefing, we demand you halt implementation of any RIFs and any other similar or related personnel actions immediately. This RIF would seek to implement the President's fiscal year 2026 budget before Congress has acted, executes the Department of Government Efficiency's (DOGE) ill-advised gutting of the Agency, and would worsen the loss of talent and scientific expertise that the Administration has already initiated. A staffing loss of this magnitude would cripple our ability to protect public health and the environment on behalf of the American people.

The Environmental Protection Agency is critical to the health and safety of every American. The Agency ensures our children can breathe clean air, safeguards our drinking water and surface waters from contamination, and oversees the cleanup of hazardous waste sites including Superfund sites that threaten communities, among other responsibilities. Federal employees are an especially critical component for carrying out the Agency's statutory duties under laws including the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and Safe Drinking Water Act. EPA employees are critical partners to states and communities, from the scientists who monitor air and water quality and the inspectors who ensure compliance with federal environmental laws implemented by states, the core principle of cooperative federalism.

This Administration has already systematically endangered these critical missions. Through deferred resignation programs, forced retirements, and outright terminations, the Agency has lost at least 3,000 employees this year—a devastating blow to institutional capacity and expertise. These losses have already resulted in delays in critical work, such as slower review of state

environmental programs, reduced ability to respond to emergencies, and delayed enforcement of violations of environmental laws.

Of particular concern are reports of potential RIFs targeting the Office of Research and Development (ORD). While other offices, including the newly created Office of Applied Sciences and Environmental Solutions, may assume operational roles, ORD uniquely ensures that EPA's policies and regulations are informed by independent scientific review and analysis, the cornerstone of evidence-based environmental protection necessary to protect public health. Importantly, the bipartisan Senate Appropriations Committee report from July 2025 specifically rejected cuts to ORD and emphasized the importance of maintaining the Agency's science and technology capacity. Further, mandating the transfer of scientific and research staff to program offices charged with implementation of EPA's regulatory authority undercuts impartial science that has long defined ORD's reputation. Any RIF targeting ORD staff would be in direct contradiction of bipartisan Congressional intent.

Decades of institutional knowledge and scientific expertise have been lost and are in further danger of being eroded. Losing staff with specialized training in toxicology, water quality science, and cumulative impact assessment is not efficient and does not achieve mission-critical goals like protecting Americans from environmental hazards, regardless of administration. These are not abstract bureaucratic concerns; these are matters of quality of life, cost of living, and public health.

Finally, we wish to make it clear that while Congress is in receipt of the President's budget request for fiscal year 2026 that proposes a 54% cut to EPA funding, Congress has not completed final action on that proposal. We note that both the House and Senate bills for fiscal year 2026 provide significantly more funding than the President's request, rejecting the drastic cuts proposed. The Senate bill in particular maintains robust funding for core EPA programs and specifically directs the Agency to maintain its research centers and labs in the Office of Research and Development. There is simply no justification for implementing staff reductions based on a budget proposal that Congress has clearly signaled it will not adopt.

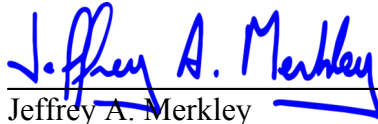
We understand these RIFs may be characterized as a response to the government shutdown. The Agency's ongoing failure to provide complete information and to work transparently with Congress is unacceptable. As a reminder any reorganization, reprogramming, or funding change is subject to the jurisdiction of the Appropriations Committee.

Recent reports confirm that the Office of Management and Budget has begun RIFs that are "substantial." According to court filings, several federal agencies issued RIF notices and general "intent to RIF" notices, including approximately 20-30 employees at EPA on October 10, with likely more to come. This coordinated, government-wide approach to implementing RIFs during a lapse in appropriations appears designed to circumvent the appropriations process.

We expect the Agency to immediately suspend any planned implementation of a pending RIF and instead provide full and complete information to the Committee for evaluation and consideration as we complete work on fiscal year 2026 appropriations. The American people

deserve an EPA with the staff and expertise necessary to fulfill its mission of protecting human health and the environment.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Department
of the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress
Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related
Agencies