

# Congress of the United States

## Washington, DC 20515

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

April 7, 2025

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

We write to highlight how the likely unlawful reorganization of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) undermines U.S. response to the opioid and mental health crisis, particularly the transitioning of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) into a new Administration for a Healthy America (AHA).

In 1992, SAMHSA was established in law to more effectively improve the capacity to address both the prevention and treatment of addressing substance use disorders (SUD) and mental health. Functionally eliminating this centralized expertise within HHS is incompatible with both current statute and addressing the ongoing addiction and overdose crisis. Such intent and reorganization would require Congressional authorization.

Addiction and mental health disorders are treatable but complex chronic diseases with a wide range of biomedical, psychiatric, psychosocial, and cultural consequences. Given the enormous impact of mental health, addiction, and overdoses on American families and communities, without a centralized agency overseeing HHS's SUD and mental health initiatives, the convergence of these crises will be ignored and their impacts will be exacerbated.

Over the last several years SAMHSA executed a strategic plan that focused on five priority areas: 1) preventing substance use and overdose; 1) enhancing access to suicide prevention and mental health services; 3) promoting resilience and emotional health for children, youth, and families; 4) integrating behavioral and physical health; and 5) strengthening the behavioral healthcare workforce. Under these priorities, SAMHSA was able to make significant strides in addressing the mental health and substance use disorder crises. For example, SAMHSA was able to improve national response times and answer rates to calls to 988 the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, for the first time since 2018, the number of Americans dying of a drug overdose declined over a one-year period. From October 2023 to September 2024, overdose deaths were reduced by 24%, from 114,000 deaths to 87,000 deaths.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Heather Saunders, "988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Two Years After Launch," 2024, KFF.](#)

<sup>2</sup> ["CDC Reports Nearly 24% Decline in U.S. Drug Overdose Deaths," 2025, CDC.](#)

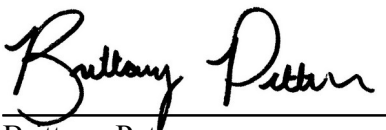
However, the mental health and substance use disorder crises are far from over, and American lives are at stake. We cannot afford to turn back the clock on the progress that SAMHSA has made, and we are deeply concerned that the absorption of SAMHSA under the AHA not only likely violates the law, but also threatens to undo this progress.

Your Administration is putting American lives on the line, and we demand a timely response to the following questions:

1. Describe in detail how the proposed reorganization will improve the ability of the Department to carry out its authorized and funded activities, and how it will enhance the health and well-being of Americans.
2. Will the AHA's division on Mental Health oversee mental health and substance use disorder initiatives that are currently overseen by SAMHSA? If yes, how will the division on Mental Health work with the other five divisions and the Center for Medicare and Medicaid services to prioritize evidence-based mental health and substance use disorder initiatives?
3. Do you plan to appoint a physician leader with experience in addiction and mental health treatment to oversee AHA's mental health and SUD initiatives?
4. Please describe what will happen to the National Mental Health and Substance Use Policy Laboratory, and what is the current status of staffing.
5. Please describe how the reorganization will impact the Office of Behavioral Health Equity.

We thank you for your consideration of this request, and we look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



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Brittany Pettersen  
Member of Congress



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Lori Trahan  
Member of Congress



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Paul Tonko  
Member of Congress



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Andrea Salinas  
Member of Congress



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Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



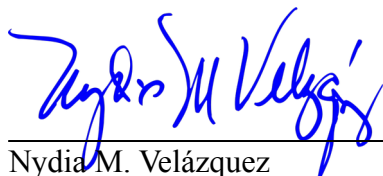
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Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Member of Congress



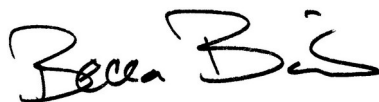
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Troy A. Carter, Sr.  
Member of Congress



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Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress



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Becca Balint  
Member of Congress



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LaMonica McIver  
Member of Congress



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Greg Landsman  
Member of Congress



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Raul Ruiz, M.D.  
Member of Congress



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Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress



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Jason Crow  
Member of Congress



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Betty McCollum  
Member of Congress



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Robert J. Menendez  
Member of Congress



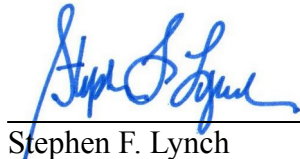
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Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress



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Gabe Amo  
Member of Congress



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Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress



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Ritchie Torres  
Member of Congress



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Josh Gottheimer  
Member of Congress



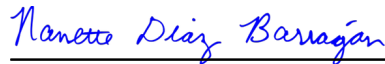
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Shri Thanedar  
Member of Congress



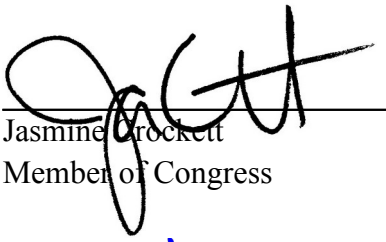
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Darren Soto  
Member of Congress



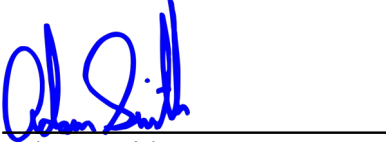
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Nanette Diaz Barragán  
Member of Congress



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Jasmine Crockett  
Member of Congress



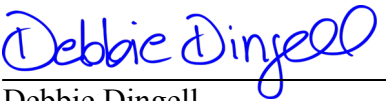
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Adam Smith  
Member of Congress



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Andre Carson  
Member of Congress



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Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress



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Chrissy Houlahan  
Member of Congress



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Rashida Tlaib  
Member of Congress



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Salud Carbajal  
Member of Congress