

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 28, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We write to urge you to reinstate funding awarded to help Rhode Island and other states to rebuild and strengthen their public health preparedness in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier this week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) terminated this funding, leaving the State of Rhode Island without \$31.2 million in promised federal funding, which will cripple its efforts to head off future disease outbreaks.

On a bipartisan basis, Congress provided significant funding over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to help states and health care organizations provide testing, treatment, and vaccines – among other efforts. This funding was critical to saving lives and keeping the health care system afloat in unprecedented circumstances. Funding was also provided to address the many systemic weaknesses in our public health infrastructure, strengthening our capacity to respond to future disease outbreaks, protect vulnerable populations, and improve communications with the public. Regrettably, CDC's decision to terminate these funds will undermine these efforts, and Rhode Island's public health system will be degraded.

Last year, the Rhode Island Department of Health, working with community and industry partners, broke ground on a new \$82 million state-of-the-art public health laboratory to replace its existing dilapidated laboratory facility. The new Rhode Island State Health Laboratory will be a crucial piece of the puzzle in investigating and mitigating life-threatening diseases. It will also provide important services for State and municipal agencies to ensure the safety of drinking water and food products; monitor pollution of air and water; and aid public safety and criminal investigations through police officer training, DNA testing, and illegal drug identification. While work on the building will continue, its ability to provide the scope of services Rhode Island needs will be limited because the CDC is cutting over \$15 million in funding that will help staff the facility and equip it with the latest testing capabilities.

The CDC cuts announced this week would also cancel \$13 million in funding for Rhode Island to improve the state's vaccine infrastructure through campaigns to promote vaccine uptake, partnerships with community organizations to encourage vaccination, and ensuring safe vaccine storage. The recent measles outbreak, including one case in Rhode Island, demonstrates the need for continued vigilance in this area. Similarly, funding for programs addressing health disparities and expanding access to community health workers has been cut. Each of these efforts is an important tool in improving our public health infrastructure and better preparing us

for the next public health emergency. It would be pennywise and pound-foolish to claw back the federal investment in this work.

Again, we urge you to reverse course immediately and to restore this critical funding. Thank you for your attention to this request, and we look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



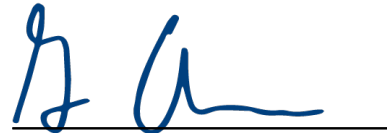
Jack Reed
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress



Gabe Amo
Member of Congress