

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 18, 2026

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

Dr. Jayanta Bhattacharya
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20982

Dear Secretary Kennedy and Director Bhattacharya:

We write as a follow-up to the June 10, 2025, letter regarding the safety stand-down at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Integrated Research Facility at Fort Detrick (IRF-Frederick). In the months since, significant developments have raised additional questions about the status and future of IRF-Frederick, including the restructuring of the facility under the NIAID Division of Intramural Research (DIR) and recent reports that NIAID is deprioritizing biodefense and pandemic preparedness research. We are seeking answers on these developments and have serious concerns about the impact these changes will have on our nation's readiness to address emerging infectious diseases and biological threats.

NIAID, one of the 27 Institutes and Centers at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), leads U.S. research efforts to diagnose, prevent, and treat high-consequence infectious diseases such as Ebola, anthrax, and SARS-CoV-2. The IRF-Frederick is one of the few facilities in the world capable of conducting research at Biosafety Level 4 (BSL-4), including advanced medical imaging of animal models under maximum containment. The facility plays a critical role in our nation's biodefense infrastructure and in the development of new diagnostics, vaccines, and medical countermeasures against deadly pathogens.¹

These developments at IRF-Frederick and NIAID occur in the broader context of unprecedented disruption at NIH. NIAID has lost more grant funding by dollar amount than any other NIH Institute, and more than half of NIH Institutes and Centers currently lack permanent directors.² Nearly 3,500 grants have been terminated altogether – and at least 300 clinical trials have been disrupted, impacting thousands of patients including children.³ The cumulative effect of grant terminations, workforce reductions, and restructuring of key research infrastructure raises serious questions about whether the United States will be prepared to respond to the next pandemic or biological threat.

¹ NIAID Role in Research, (March 17, 2026), <https://www.niaid.nih.gov/research/accomplishments>

² NBC News, *National Institutes of Health faces leadership vacuum as director positions sit open*, (February 15, 2026), <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/national-institutes-health-director-positions-unfilled-rcna257834>

³ Senator Sanders Minority Staff Report, *Putting Cures Out of Reach: Trump's National Institutes of Health* (February 2, 2026), https://www.sanders.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/02.02.2026_Putting-Cures-Out-of-Reach_final.pdf

In the interest of American lives, our nation's readiness to address new and emerging infectious diseases, and maintaining U.S. leadership in biomedical research, we respectfully ask for your prompt response to the following questions by April 1, 2026:

1. What were the findings of the FBI investigation that Secretary Kennedy referenced during his May 14, 2025, testimony before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions?
2. When was the safety stand-down at IRF-Frederick officially lifted? Did NIAID, NIH, or HHS leadership communicate this action to local officials, the Frederick community, and the relevant congressional committees of jurisdiction?
3. Please provide a list of all research activities that were impacted, suspended, or terminated as a result of the safety stand-down, including the status of the facility's animal models.
4. Did any safety protocols or standard operating procedures at IRF-Frederick or other BSL-4 labs change as a result of the March 10, 2025, incident and subsequent investigation?
5. Reports indicate that prior to the safety stand-down, IRF-Frederick maintained 168 personnel.⁴ What is the current status of these personnel? How many were contract staff versus federal employees?
6. What happened to the federal employees who were reportedly put on administrative leave at the time of the safety stand-down? Were any of these employees transferred to other NIAID divisions, separated from employment, or otherwise affected?
7. How and when was the decision made to restructure IRF-Frederick and move it from the Division of Clinical Research to the Division of Intramural Research (DIR)? What was the rationale for this change?
8. How will the research priorities, activities, and staffing at IRF-Frederick differ under DIR compared to its prior structure under the Division of Clinical Research? What will this transition entail and when will it be completed? To what extent will any research activities or operations be contracted out?
9. What is the current status of research activities at IRF-Frederick? To what extent have operations been restored since the safety stand-down was lifted, and when will the facility be fully operational?
10. How will the research priorities, activities, and staffing at IRF-Frederick change under the "New Strategic Vision"⁵ outlined by Director Bhattacharya on January 16, 2026?
11. If NIAID is deprioritizing biodefense and pandemic preparedness research, how will NIH and the Administration ensure that the United States is prepared to prevent and respond to emerging pathogens and infectious diseases? Please provide an analysis of the impact deprioritizing these research areas will have on the development of new diagnostics, vaccines, and medical countermeasures.

Sincerely,

⁴ Wired, *RFK Jr.'s HHS Orders Lab Studying Deadly Infectious Diseases to Stop Research*, (April 30, 2025), <https://www.wired.com/story/hhs-niaid-irf-ebola-disease-research-stop/>

⁵ Nature Medicine, *The new vision from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)*, (January 16, 2026), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12820581/>



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator



April McClain Delaney
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