

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 5, 2026

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

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

We write to express concern about the severe understaffing of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) advisory councils. In the last year, only one member has been added across the 24 NIH advisory councils. These advisory councils play a critical role in funding medical research, serving as the final arbiter after NIH study sections review grant applications. The current understaffing of NIH advisory councils will imperil medical research and harm the health of Americans for generations.

Federal law requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to appoint an advisory council for each NIH research institute. Each advisory council consists of ex officio, nonvoting members including the Secretary of HHS, the NIH Director, the Institute Director, the Undersecretary of Health and Chief Dental Officer for the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, as well as a maximum of 20 voting members. Voting members each serve four- year terms with up to a six-month extension. Two thirds of the voting membership is composed of leading representatives of health and scientific disciplines relevant to the institute, including no less than two in public health and behavioral or social sciences, and one-third leaders of public policy, law, health policy, economics, and management.<sup>1</sup>

Dozens of members were nominated between 2023 and 2024 to these advisory councils through a process that has been used for decades. In order to identify council candidates, each division in a given Institute has their program officers review NIH databases, scientific journals and relevant publications, attend professional meetings, and consult eminent investigators. The Office of Committee Management (OCM) reviews these nominations, then sends the list of candidates with detailed background information to the Office of Federal Advisory Committee Policy. The slate is then sent to NIH, and finally HHS leadership for final approval.<sup>2</sup>

In July 2025, the Administration rescinded invitations for these nominees from academic medical centers across the country to join the advisory councils.<sup>3</sup> The impact of rescinding these invitations is alarming: critical research centers like the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI), the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), and the National Institute on Aging (NIA) are set to lose all of their advisory council members in 2026.<sup>4</sup> In the midst of the largest measles epidemic in 25 years, the NIAID advisory council is only functioning at 33 percent of its maximum staffing.

These advisory council members play a crucial role in allocating billions of dollars of funding for medical research, improving the country's health and serving as a core driver of economic growth in many states.<sup>5</sup> To continue to be a world leader in biomedical innovation, we need these critical scientists and public policy collaborators. Leaving these pivotal

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<sup>1</sup> [42 USC 284a: Advisory councils](#)

<sup>2</sup> [What is the NIAID Advisory Council and What Does it Do?](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Exclusive: NIH to dismiss dozens of grant reviewers to align with Trump priorities](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Exclusive: key NIH review panels due to lose all members by the end of 2026](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Annual Economic Report - United For Medical Research](#)

research institute advisory councils understaffed will severely disrupt medical research, harming millions of Americans and imperiling our economy and global standing.

We implore you to immediately return the vetted nominees to their research institutes. Additionally, we request answers to the following questions by March 20, 2026.

1. Please provide a list of already vetted nominees and their current standing.
2. Does the NIH and HHS intend to reextend invitations to any of the professionals whose invitations were rescinded?
3. Can you provide a clear timeline of when you will be soliciting and submitting nominations for the advisory council positions.
4. How do the NIH and HHS plan to ensure the same process of scientific rigor that has been followed for years will be followed in this cycle of advisory council nominations?
5. What will you do to ensure a stable pipeline of qualified advisory council nominees for future years during this administration?

Sincerely,



Suzan K. DelBene  
Member of Congress



Brian K. Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress



Andre Carson  
Member of Congress



Dan Goldman  
Member of Congress



Sean Casten  
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



Marilyn Strickland  
Member of Congress



Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress



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Lori Trahan  
Member of Congress



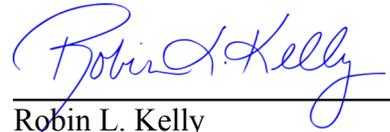
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Adam Smith  
Member of Congress



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Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress



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Robin L. Kelly  
Member of Congress



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Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress



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Terri A. Sewell  
Member of Congress



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Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress



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Glenn F. Ivey  
Member of Congress



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Paul Tonko  
Member of Congress



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Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Member of Congress



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Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress



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Rashida Tlaib  
Member of Congress



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Kelly Morrison  
Member of Congress



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Melanie Stansbury  
Member of Congress



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Doris Matsui  
Member of Congress



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Maxine Dexter  
Member of Congress



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Dave Min  
Member of Congress



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Emily Randall  
Member of Congress



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Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Andrea Salinas  
Member of Congress



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Gabe Amo  
Member of Congress



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Kim Schrier, M.D.  
Member of Congress