



April 4, 2025

Sent Via U.S. Mail

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

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

We write on behalf of the undersigned Waterkeeper Alliance Organizations and Affiliates concerning recent actions taken by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that have led to the termination or suspension of climate-related programs and grants. Given your longstanding commitment to environmental protection and clean water, we respectfully urge you in your role as Secretary of HHS to help develop common sense, practical solutions to ensure everyone in America lives in a healthy environment.

Like you, we recognize climate change is an existential threat. However, we are concerned that HHS has taken steps that undermine its ability to fulfill its mission, including cutting funding for climate change and health research, eliminating the Office of Environmental Justice, and dismantling the Office of Climate Change and Health Equity.

In addition, at your confirmation hearing, you committed to “radical transparency” under your leadership at HHS. Despite this promise, one of your first actions as HHS Secretary was to unravel decades of precedent by eliminating a longstanding policy known as the “Richardson Waiver,” under which HHS voluntarily agreed to follow the notice-and-comment rulemaking procedures in the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) for federal rules concerning “agency management or personnel or to public property, loans, grants, benefits, or contracts” and invoke the APA’s good-cause exception “sparingly.” The good cause exception permits agencies to waive the APA’s notice and comment requirement if the agency finds good cause exists and if compliance would be “impracticable, unnecessary, or contrary to the public interest.”

The recent changes at HHS significantly weaken the federal response to the health threats posed by climate change. Increased heat-related deaths, worsened air quality leading to respiratory and cardiovascular issues, the spread of vector-borne diseases, and waterborne illness from flooding have been linked to climate change. Additionally, extreme weather events, wildfires, and food insecurity disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, while mental health issues rise due to displacement. The World Health Organization estimates climate

change will cause an additional 250,000 deaths per year globally between 2030 and 2050. These challenges demand an all-hands-on-deck response to mitigate the public health impacts of climate change and protect at-risk communities.

Simply put, America can't be healthy if the planet isn't healthy.

To protect and promote the health of America, Waterkeeper Alliance urges you to take immediate action to:

- Restore the Office of Environmental Justice to ensure that HHS policies and programs address the needs of the communities most affected.
- Reinstate funding for programs at the National Institutes of Health that support critical research on the health impacts of climate change.
- Reinstate the Office of Climate Change and Health Equity, established in 2021 to address disproportionate exposure to climate hazards and build community health resilience.
- Rescind the March 3, 2025 policy statement exempting HHS from soliciting public input on certain federal rules concerning grants, benefits, or contracts among others.
- Restart the grant review process at NIH in its entirety. The freeze has caused significant disruption to the research community including concerns about delays in research projects, loss of funding, and the potential for researchers to leave the field.

Human well-being is directly tied to the environment. Restoring these vital programs will help ensure a healthier future for generations to come. As Secretary of Health and Human Services, we urge you to stand firm in your commitment to protecting our planet.

Sincerely,

Alamosa Riverkeeper

Assateague Coastkeeper - Assateague Coastal Trust

Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper - Blue Water Baltimore

Bayou City Waterkeeper

Bitterroot River Protection Association, a Waterkeeper Alliance Affiliate

Black-Sampit Riverkeeper

Black Warrior Riverkeeper

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper

CA Urban Streams Alliance-The Stream Team, a Waterkeeper Alliance Affiliate

Calusa Waterkeeper

Cape Fear Riverkeeper - Cape Fear River Watch

Chautauqua-Conewango Consortium, A Waterkeeper Alliance Affiliate

Chester Riverkeeper - ShoreRivers

Choctawhatchee Riverkeeper

Choptank Riverkeeper

Collier County Waterkeeper
Coosa Riverkeeper
Colorado Riverkeeper
Dan Riverkeeper
Emerald Coastkeeper
French Broad Riverkeeper - MountainTrue
Grand Riverkeeper
Grand Traverse Bay Waterkeeper - The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay
Great Basin Waterkeeper
Great Salt Lake Waterkeeper
Great Swamp Watershed Association, a Passaic River Waterkeeper Alliance Affiliate
Gunpowder Riverkeeper
Hackensack Riverkeeper
Hudson Riverkeeper
Hurricane Creekkeeper
Humboldt Waterkeeper
Indian Riverkeeper
Inland Empire Waterkeeper
Kansas Riverkeeper - Friends of the Kaw
Kissimmee Waterkeeper
Kentucky Riverkeeper
Lake George Waterkeeper
Las Vegas Water Defender, a Colorado Riverkeeper Affiliate
Long Island Soundkeeper
Los Angeles Waterkeeper
Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper Association
Lumber Riverkeeper
Matanzas Riverkeeper
Milwaukee Riverkeeper
Miles-Wye Riverkeeper
Miami Waterkeeper
Monterey Waterkeeper
Narragansett Bay Riverkeeper - Save The Bay
North Sound Waterkeeper
Ogeechee Riverkeeper
Orange County Coastkeeper
Peconic Baykeeper
Peoria Riverkeeper
Pearl Riverkeeper
Potomac Riverkeeper - Potomac Riverkeeper Network
Puget Soundkeeper Alliance
Raritan Riverkeeper
Rogue Riverkeeper
San Antonio Bay Estuarine Waterkeeper

Santa Barbara Channelkeeper
Sassafras Riverkeeper - ShoreRivers
Satilla Riverkeeper
Savannah Riverkeeper
Seneca Lake Guardian, a Waterkeeper Alliance Affiliate
Shasta Waterkeeper
Shenandoah Riverkeeper
Snake River Waterkeeper
Spokane Riverkeeper
Spring Creek Coalition, a Waterkeeper Alliance Affiliate
St. Johns Riverkeeper
Suwannee Riverkeeper
Tar Creekkeeper
Three Rivers Waterkeeper
Twin Harbors Waterkeeper
Upper Allegheny River Project, a Waterkeeper Alliance Affiliate
Upper Coosa Riverkeeper
Upper Potomac Riverkeeper - Potomac Riverkeeper Network
Waccamaw Riverkeeper - Winyah Rivers Alliance
Watauga Riverkeeper - MountainTrue
Waterkeeper Alliance
Waterkeepers Chesapeake
White Oak Waterkeeper
Willamette Riverkeeper
Yadkin Riverkeeper
Youghiogheny Riverkeeper
Yuba River Waterkeeper