

U.S. Health Workers Urge RFK Jr. to Stop Disparaging Public Health Institutions

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Health and Human Services staff, more than 750 current and former employees, have delivered a formal letter to Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., urging him to address what they describe as inaccurate health information. The appeal follows a deadly shooting at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) headquarters in Atlanta on August

8. The staff stressed urgency for action to protect their safety and reaffirm confidence in public health institutions.

The letter links Kennedy's recent actions, including the dismissal of members from the CDC vaccine advisory panel, his encouragement of public debate on vaccines, and his challenges to federal health agencies, to an increase in harassment and threats aimed at CDC employees. It suggests that the tensions contributed to the violent attack, which involved a gunman firing nearly 200 rounds across six CDC buildings and resulted in a police officer's death.

Staff members frame the letter as a plea for leadership that reaffirms the scientific integrity of agencies. They urge Kennedy to "cease promoting what they view as misleading claims about vaccines, infectious disease transmission, and America's public health institutions." The demand reflects concern that the secretary's approach has weakened credibility and placed employees at risk.

In addition, the staff request that HHS remove online content, particularly so-called "DEI watchlists" which they argue unfairly target federal employees. Critics counter that such requests risk government intrusion into open discourse. They also call for strengthened emergency protocols and improved security measures to ensure staff can carry out their duties without fear of retaliation or violence.

The agency responded by affirming that the safety and well-being of CDC workers remain a top priority. The department noted Kennedy's visit to the agency following the attack and described CDC as "a shining star among global health agencies." The statement cautioned against politicizing the

incident, asserting that public health reforms should not be conflated with violence.

The intersection of vaccine debates, employee safety, and government messaging highlights the tension between free expression and institutional authority. HHS employees argue that misinformation directly undermines morale, jeopardizes credibility, and diminishes public trust in critical scientific institutions.

Observers view the appeal as a reflection of broader tensions within federal health agencies under the current administration. Critics of Kennedy identify a pattern of controversial policy shifts, such as personnel changes and questioning vaccine safety, that clash with mainstream scientific consensus and may amplify institutional vulnerability in the face of threats. Supporters argue, however, that encouraging transparency and skepticism of government authority remains a valid safeguard for individual liberty.

As lawmakers, stakeholders, and professional associations monitor this situation, the response from HHS, including whether it will re-embrace evidence-based messaging, will likely shape how front-line scientists and public health officials operate under political pressure.