

May 13, 2025

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair
House Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro:

Thank you for allowing the National Safety Council (NSC) to submit this statement for the record on today's hearing titled: "Hearing on Fiscal Year 2026 Department of Health and Human Services Budget." This hearing could not come at a more needed time given the current workforce and programmatic challenges facing the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). NSC looks forward to your leadership in addressing these challenges through robust oversight of HHS to ensure its continued support for proven public health programs and strategies that detect and eliminate disease and illness in the United States.

National Safety Council

The National Safety Council (NSC) is America's leading nonprofit safety advocate – and has been for over 110 years. As a mission-based organization, we work to eliminate the leading causes of preventable death and injury, focusing our efforts on the workplace and roadway. We create a culture of safety to protect people from hazard and injury in the workplace and beyond so they can live their fullest lives. Our more than 13,000 member companies and federal agency partners represent employees at nearly 41,000 U.S. worksites.

The HHS Mission is Critical to Millions of Workers in the United States

HHS agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), are vital to the health of America's workforce. Most recently, the United States saw the havoc infectious disease and illness can cause on the workforce through the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic shuttered businesses and was responsible for the death of over one million people in the United States as of March 2023.¹ However, it was the work of the dedicated public servants within the HHS workforce that partnered with private industry and the safety community to facilitate return-to-work policies that

¹ <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

kept America's workforce safe on the job.² NSC implores you to utilize your congressional oversight authority to ensure any forthcoming or previously instituted reductions in force (RIFs) at HHS do not exacerbate the safety challenges businesses and workers are already faced with.

Prioritizing Occupational Safety and Health Within HHS

Created in 1970 by Congress, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has been the federal government's leading research expert on keeping America's workforce safe and healthy. The Institute has conducted research, facilitated countless on-site inspections and ensured equipment used to protect workers from respiratory threats are safe and properly functioning. No other entity within the federal government is equipped to tackle this worthwhile challenge and NIOSH functions cannot be smoothly integrated into other departments. Additionally, other federal agencies such as the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) rely on NIOSH research for the promulgation of their safety standards. RIFs cause the enforcement of these standards to be delayed, potentially costing numerous lives.³

Two research functions impacted by the previously announced RIFs at HHS include the National Personal Protective Technology Laboratory (NPTTL) and the Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation Program (FACE). These programs are exemplary examples of how federal investment in occupational safety and health ensures the safety of America's workforce.

Through NPTTL, NIOSH certifies respirators which are used by thousands of workers including those in the manufacturing, health care, construction and mining industries. For the mining industry, these respirators protect miners from deadly diseases such as black lung and silicosis. Illness from faulty or fraudulent respirators can lead to employees needing to leave the workforce, economic losses in medical expenses and lost wages and painful death. The potential for faulty or fraudulent respirators entering the United States market has greatly increased given NIOSH is no longer accepting new respirators for testing and respirator costs could increase due to potential tariffs.

The FACE Program is another storied program at NIOSH which aims to prevent serious injuries and fatalities at jobsites through investigations, hazard identification and public findings.⁴ By publicizing reports on hazard analysis, NIOSH research is helping to prevent future workplace injuries and fatalities which cost the United States economy \$176.5 billion in 2023.⁵ NIOSH prioritizes efforts for this program by the focus areas of participating states and overall federal goals. Without FACE and

² <https://www.nsc.org/getmedia/f5dfd05d-83bf-4753-8903-538a24157725/safer-framework-summary.pdf>

³ <https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/26676-msha-temporarily-pauses-enforcement-of-silica-final-rule>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/face/about/index.html>

⁵ <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/work/costs/work-injury-costs/>

other NIOSH safety programs, America's workers and employers will be more at risk.

NIOSH Areas of Influence

The work of NIOSH does not exist in a silo, instead, it permeates throughout the federal government and private industry alike with a singular focus: protecting America's workforce. NIOSH research has been critical to establishing heat acclimatization recommendations which are currently being used by businesses to prevent heat illness among their workforce population.⁶ NIOSH research has consistently shown a link between "exposure to physical factors at work" and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).⁷ NIOSH also established a recommended exposure limit (REL) to prevent hearing loss in occupational settings. While all industries are at risk, specific hazard risks exist for workers in the mining, manufacturing and construction industries.⁸ Furthermore, NIOSH research was critical to OSHA's "Guidelines for Health Care and Social Service Workers" – a framework to prevent workplace violence in the health care industry.⁹ The National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety (NCCRAHS), a NIOSH-funded Agricultural Center, developed age-appropriate guidelines to prevent injuries from heavy machinery, chemicals and heat stress.¹⁰ Sadly NIOSH-funded research efforts into opioid overdose prevention programs for commercial fishermen have been discontinued.¹¹ Research and practitioner efforts to combat the opioid epidemic have been of great importance to this committee, the Trump Administration, and the employer community. With opioid deaths decreasing in the United States, now is not the time to back away from efforts that will keep employees safe from harm – especially in high-impact industries such as fishing, construction, manufacturing and transportation.¹²

These safety topics are all critical to the success of America's workforce, including the ability to compete in product production on the world stage. When industries see skyrocketing rates of severe injuries and fatalities, it prevents the incoming workforce from seeing that industry as a valuable career option. Today, the industries with the highest number of deaths include:

1. Transportation and warehousing
2. Construction

⁶ https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/heat-stress/recommendations/acclimatization.html#cdc_health_safety_special_topic_types-acclimatization-schedule

⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/97-141/default.html>

⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/noise/about/noise.html#:~:text=Take%20precautions%20when%20noise%20is,loss%20over%20their%20working%20lifetime.>

⁹ https://www.cdc.gov/WPVHC/Nurses/Course/Slide/Unit5_5

¹⁰ <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2011-129/default.html>

¹¹ <https://deohs.washington.edu/pnash/evaluating-opioid-overdose-prevention-program-commercial-fishermen-cdc-program-evaluation-framework>

¹² <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2025/2025-cdc-reports-decline-in-us-drug-overdose-deaths.html#:~:text=New%20provisional%20data%20from%20CDC's,compared%20to%20the%20previous%20year.>

3. Agricultural, forestry, fishing, and hunting
4. Government
5. Professional and business services
6. Manufacturing¹³

NIOSH efforts on critical safety topics are of immense importance to private industry and the safety community. The House Appropriations Committee has, in a bipartisan manner, continued to recognize the importance of a safe and healthy workforce on the United States economy. NSC asks the committee to continue to recognize that truth and ensure NIOSH is positioned to shape the conversations surrounding occupational safety and health within the federal government.

Conclusion

NSC, and our member companies, recognize the importance of NIOSH and the federal workforce that supports the agency's mission. Employers want to prioritize safety, but some do not know where to start. NIOSH resources are a great opportunity for entry for organizations building safety and health programs at their jobsites. Only with a strong culture of safety will American businesses thrive and compete on the world stage.

NSC is grateful to the committee for the opportunity to share this statement for the record and looks forward to continued engagement with the committee and HHS on priority safety topics that affect safe business operations for employers.

¹³ <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/work/industry-incidence-rates/most-dangerous-industries/>