

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “The Fiscal Year 2026 Department of Health and Human Services Budget”

June 24, 2025

For the past six months, the Trump Administration has created chaos within our health system by cancelling funding grants, rescinding billions of dollars in obligated funding, firing thousands of civil servants, and eliminating entire agencies and programs within HHS.

Today’s hearing is important because it finally provides us the opportunity to get some answers from Secretary Kennedy. For months, we’ve been demanding answers on the Administration’s actions that seriously threaten the health and well-being of the American people. Many of these actions have been illegal, but Secretary Kennedy has refused to provide this Committee any justification for his actions. I find that is unacceptable.

I expressed deep concerns with your nomination, Secretary Kennedy, and somehow, unfortunately, you have exceeded my expectations in the worst possible ways. You are actively undermining vaccines – the greatest public health achievement in modern history. Earlier this month, you unilaterally fired all 17 members of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, the medical experts who develop vaccine recommendations, and appointed eight anti-vaccine people. It’s clear that you do not intend to uphold the commitments you made to the Senate during your confirmation process to not take away people’s access to vaccines. Instead, you intend to use your position to advance your dangerous pseudo-science agenda, putting the lives of Americans – and especially children – at risk.

The chaos has not been limited to vaccines. The Trump Administration cut nearly \$3.8 billion in grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) creating extreme uncertainty for medical researchers across the country and threatening future medical innovation. Things are so chaotic at NIH that more than 340 of its top scientists signed a letter to the NIH Director detailing unprecedented waste, abuse, and illegality at NIH under the Trump Administration. This was an unprecedented action by these employees who must feel they have no other options at this point than to go public.

In addition to widespread grant cancellations, tens of thousands of civil servants have been fired across HHS. Secretary Kennedy, you have claimed that these staffing cuts have not interfered with program operations, but we know for a fact that this is not true. Entire offices and centers have been eliminated because there is no staff left to run them. Grantees and stakeholders can’t get answers to their basic program questions. Staff at FDA and CDC have had to be brought back just to keep programs running, and deadlines at FDA are being missed. These decisions have been made indiscriminately, without any regard for their impact on the health and well-being of the American people.

And now Secretary Kennedy has proposed a budget for the upcoming fiscal year that includes drastic and devastating cuts to our health agencies. The Administration proposes a 54 percent cut to the CDC, threatening the agency's ability to protect the health of the American people. It proposes a 40 percent cut to NIH, which will seriously threaten our ability to conduct medical research into new life-saving treatments and cures. And it proposes an 11 percent cut to the FDA, decimating our ability to approve safe and effective drugs and medical products, and keep our food supply safe.

Secretary Kennedy has also proposed a reorganization of HHS that would not only eliminate important programs but entire agencies, including the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. This action will seriously undermine our ability to continue to make progress against the opioid crisis.

All of these actions decimate our public health infrastructure, and they come at the same time Republicans are pushing their Big Ugly Bill that would take health care away from 16 million Americans so they can give giant tax breaks to their billionaire friends. The Republican bill is the largest health care cut in American history – ripping health care away from tens of millions of Americans, increasing costs of everyone else, and forcing the closure of hospitals and nursing homes. It will have dire consequences for our entire health care system and I believe people will die.

There is a lot to cover today at this budget hearing, but Secretary Kennedy must appear here again very soon for an oversight hearing on the unprecedented and troubling chaos he has created at the vaccine panel and its impacts on people's access to life-saving vaccines. These disturbing actions warrant investigation, and I hope Chairman Guthrie will join us in getting answers on behalf of the American people.

And with that I yield back the balance of my time.