

May 5, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

I write to you today to express deep concern about the Reduction in Force (RIF) notices issued on April 1, 2025, to Californians employed by the Food and Drug Administration's San Francisco Human and Animal Food Laboratory. These federal workers play a critical role in protecting and promoting the health and wellness of Americans across the country by ensuring food and other products are free of toxic substances. The administration's action to shutter this food safety lab is a threat to public safety. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is responsible for protecting and promoting public health of Americans and these decisions run counter to the agency's mission. I strongly urge you to immediately and officially reinstate all employees to their former positions.

The San Francisco Human and Animal Food Laboratory has been nationally recognized for its expertise in microbiology, virology, parasitology, whole gene sequencing, bacterial and fungal sequencing, heavy metals and toxic elements detection, and food color and additive analyses.¹ The facility is one of only four food safety labs in the US specializing in low-level detection of toxic elements in food, including testing infant formula for heavy metals – an effort this administration has stated is a priority under Operation Stork Speed.² The lab also plays a critical role in monitoring food products for evidence of microbial contamination and foodborne pathogens. Critically, the lab's proximity to California's Central Valley – which produces one fourth of the nation's food – plays an essential role in ensuring fruits and vegetables consumed by Americans across the country are safe for consumption.

In addition to highlighting the broad public health and safety implications of shuttering the San Francisco Human and Animal Food Laboratory, it is also critical to note the devastating impact this action has had on the dedicated scientists and lab workers employed there. Despite reports

¹ <https://www.fda.gov/science-research/field-science-and-laboratories/san-francisco-human-and-animal-food-laboratory-sanlfah>

² <https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/operation-stork-speed.html>

earlier this week that RIFs issued to scientists at FDA food safety labs have been reversed,³ FDA lab employees have not received any official paperwork regarding the rescissions. The mass firing of FDA lab workers, and later reports that the action would be reversed, are in direct conflict with Commissioner Makary's April 17th statement that "there were no layoffs to scientists or food inspectors." The confusion and uncertainty caused by this administration's contradicting and ever-evolving positions has had a profound financial and emotional impact on the scientists and lab workers who have dedicated their careers to protecting Americans' health. FDA must immediately provide all San Francisco Human and Animal Food Laboratory employees with the official paperwork needed to reinstate their positions and ensure that employees receive clear communication and direction from FDA regarding next steps in the rehiring process.

The work conducted by the dedicated scientists and lab workers at FDA food safety labs plays a critical role in protecting the health and wellbeing of Americans across the country. I strongly urge that all San Francisco Human and Animal Food Laboratory employees are immediately and officially reinstated to their previously held positions and strongly oppose any action that would subject these workers to additional probationary requirements. Any effort to further disrupt or thwart their work presents an increased threat to public health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Adam B. Schiff". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Adam" and last name "Schiff" clearly legible, and "B." in the middle.

Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator

³ https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/25/health/fda-food-safety-trump-layoffs.html?utm_campaign=KHN%3A%20Daily%20Health%20Policy%20Report&utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANqtz--2L0yS0OZoN211B3mmrCYZMLZhfpEROx7VfSESIFVU38eZCPX1nRh0wDVZ5nv4yVAHKbkHz_wDah6TY-R7qh7l9mb_pjo_l880yAs_mZtodOqQI&hsmi=358789562&utm_content=358789562&utm_source=hs_email