

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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March 26, 2025

The Honorable Lee Zeldin
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Administrator Zeldin,

We write to demand that you cease any plans to weaken or shutter the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Research and Development (ORD). ORD is enshrined in statute. Virtually since the creation of the EPA itself, ORD has served as the cornerstone of science-based decision-making at the agency, which is required to use the best available science to protect human health and the environment. It has come to the Committee's attention that the EPA's Agency RIF and Reorganization Plan (ARRP), submitted pursuant to Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Russell T. Vought's February 26, 2025, memo,¹ proposes to "eliminate the Office of Research and Development as an EPA National Program Office" and fire "a majority (50-75%)" of employees.² This would be illegal. It would also be a catastrophe for public health, environmental protection, and the civil servants working in ORD offices across the country. You must abandon this plan immediately so that the dedicated scientists at ORD can continue their work to keep Americans safe.

EPA cannot adequately protect public health and the environment without using the best available science, and it cannot use the best available science without ORD. The science that is conducted at ORD laboratories, funded by ORD grants, and supported by ORD technical expertise is the foundation of the agency's entire mission. In recent years, ORD scientists have worked to understand the most dangerous environmental hazards threatening the American

¹ Memorandum from Russell T. Vought and Charles Ezell to Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, "Guidance on Agency RIF and Reorganization Plans Requested by *Implementing The President's 'Department of Government Efficiency' Workforce Optimization Initiative*," February 26, 2025, accessed here: <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/latest-memos/guidance-on-agency-rif-and-reorganization-plans-requested-by-implementing-the-president-s-department-of-government-efficiency-workforce-optimization-initiative.pdf>.

² Information on file with the Committee.

public, from PFAS in drinking water to the air pollution caused by wildfire smoke to the risks of aging wastewater infrastructure. ORD performs cutting-edge environmental research in its own laboratories while funding groundbreaking research around the country. ORD also provides indispensable technical assistance to state governments as they work to strengthen their own environmental science capabilities and uphold state and local environmental protections. It is no exaggeration to say that ORD is a crown jewel of the agency. Without it, EPA simply cannot do its job. Eliminating ORD willfully blinds the EPA to present environmental dangers and future environmental risks, and every American would be less safe because of it.

The elimination of ORD would have immediate adverse consequences on the hard-working civil servants conducting and supporting EPA science in offices across the country. The 1,540 employees referenced in EPA's reorganization plan work in the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Rhode Island.³ These labs drive scientific innovation to the regions in which they are located. Cutting up to 75% of staff in these offices would devastate these regions' ability to maintain scientific leadership in critical disciplines that have direct impacts on health and safety. It is entirely contrary to EPA's mission to put toxicologists, chemists, emergency response specialists, epidemiologists, and more out of work. While the environmental impacts of these cuts will happen months and years down the road, the brain drain will hit these regions immediately. It is imperative that future reorganization and reduction in force plans change course and preserve the crucial work of ORD.

Eliminating ORD violates the law and compromises EPA's ability to meet dozens of legal obligations required in numerous environmental laws. In order to conduct oversight of EPA's ability to achieve its mission and comply with its statutory obligations, we request that you provide the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology with your Agency RIF and Reorganization Plan immediately upon transmitting it to OMB and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) pursuant to the April 14, 2025, deadline described in Director Vought's February memo. We also request that you brief Committee staff, within one week of the plan's transmittal to OMB and OPM, on how EPA created the plan, any analysis performed to inform the plan, and the projected impact of the plan on EPA's workforce and activities.

Pursuant to Rule X of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology "shall review and study on a continuing basis laws, programs, and Government activities relating to nonmilitary research and development."⁴ The Committee possesses jurisdiction over environmental research and development.⁵ If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Sara Palasits or Josh Schneider with the Committee's Minority staff at (202) 225-6375. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

³ "About the Office of Research and Development," Environmental Protection Agency, accessed here: <https://www.epa.gov/aboutepa/about-office-research-and-development-ord>

⁴ [119 First Session House Rules](#).

⁵ *Id.*



Zoe Lofgren
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