

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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March 11, 2025

Sethuraman Panchanathan
Director
National Science Foundation
2415 Eisenhower Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Director Panchanathan,

We write to you in advance of the March 13, 2025, deadline for Agency Reorganization Plans. As leaders on the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, we are extremely concerned that the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) will seek to slash and burn core functions of the National Science Foundation (NSF) to sacrifice the agency at the altar of their twisted idea of “efficiency.” It is imperative that you stand up for NSF’s critical work and ensure that the Agency Reorganization Plan does not compromise the agency’s ability to carry out Congressionally authorized activities and advance our nation’s public safety, economic prosperity, and national security.

In Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Russell T. Vought’s February 26, 2025, memorandum, he writes that agencies’ plans should drive “the highest-quality, most efficient delivery of their statutorily-required functions.”¹ In the slapdash, broad, illegal firings of probationary employees across the federal government, agencies terminated many employees who had statutorily obligated responsibilities. Many of these firings across the government have been rescinded – some in response to judicial rulings² and administrative actions,³ and some because the firings were embarrassing and flagrantly in violation of agency missions to

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 Andrea Hsu, “Judge says Trump’s mass firing of federal employees is illegal and should be stopped,” *NPR*, March 1, 2025, accessed here: <https://www.npr.org/2025/02/27/nx-s1-5311445/federal-employees-firing-court-judge>.

³ Andrea Hsu, “6 federal workers get their jobs back in 1st successful challenge to Trump’s firings,” *NPR*, February 26, 2025, accessed here: <https://www.npr.org/2025/02/25/nx-s1-5307906/trump-probationary-employees-firing-mspb>.

contribute to national security and public safety.^{4,5} In short, the probationary firings were a complete fiasco. It is clear that DOGE equates “efficiency” to the number of bodies it forces out the door – through illegal firings or coercion. It falls to you to stand up for the important mission of NSF.

You know very well how important the mission of NSF is. NSF grants fund foundational research that advances the frontiers of science. The agency invests in STEM education at every level, from kindergarten through post-doctoral fellowships, to ensure we maintain scientific leadership for generations to come. Through the *CHIPS & Science Act*, NSF provides cross-government expertise on research security, safeguarding the U.S. research enterprise from malign foreign interference.⁶ NSF maintains facilities at both ends of the earth – its presence in the Arctic and Antarctic are critical for world-class science only possible in these extreme environments, and diminishing U.S. presence at the poles will have serious geopolitical consequences as adversaries including China and Russia seek to increase their footprints.⁷ It is absolutely critical that these and other functions are not eliminated or de facto eliminated due to reductions in force that make it impossible for NSF to continue its work.

NSF’s scientific mandate is an essential part of American competitiveness. We are locked in a race with China to ensure that the next wave of great technological breakthroughs happen here in the United States. Our national security and our economic prosperity depend on American scientists remaining at the forefront of global scientific innovation, so that the defining knowledge and technologies of the 21st Century are shaped by American values rather than the values of our rivals. If NSF loses its capacity to support the American scientific enterprise, it will be a generational setback for American interests. We cannot expect to maintain our leadership in key technology and research areas if we fire the scientists, close the offices, and attack the science underpinning that leadership. China is investing more, not less, in critical science. You must defend NSF’s ability to not just stay in the game, but to win it.

Congress appropriated NSF the money to pay staff and fulfill your legal obligations. Firing employees and diminishing your agency past the point where it can function does not deliver money back to the taxpayer; it violates the laws enacted by representatives elected by the American people, and it violates the Impoundment Control Act of 1974.⁸ President Trump and Elon Musk are lying to the American people when they claim that terminations, cuts, and cancellations will put more money in Americans’ pockets. As Director of NSF, you are obligated to spend the money appropriated to your agency as Congress intended. You must ensure your Agency Reorganization Plan does not break the law.

⁴ Brandon Drenon, “U.S. government tries to rehire nuclear staff it fired days ago,” *BBC*, February 18, 2025, accessed here: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4g3nrx1dq5o>.

⁵ Josh Funk, “Agriculture Department tries to rehire fired workers tied to bird flu response,” *AP*, February 19, 2025, accessed here: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4g3nrx1dq5o>.

⁶ CHIPS & Science Act, Subtitle D – NSF Research Security, accessed here: <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/services/files/CFC99CC6-CE84-4B1A-8BBF-8D2E84BD7965#page=497>.

⁷ “Office of Polar Programs,” National Science Foundation, accessed here: <https://www.nsf.gov/geo/opp>.

⁸ 2 USC Ch. 17B: Impoundment Control, accessed here: <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title2/chapter17B&edition=prelim>.

In order to conduct oversight of NSF's ability to uphold its mission and legal obligations, we request that you provide the Committee your Agency Reorganization Plan immediately upon transmitting it to OMB and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). We also request that you brief Committee staff, within one week of the plan's transmittal to OMB and OPM, on how NSF created the plan, any analysis performed to inform the plan, and the projected impact of the plan on NSF'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."⁹ The Committee possesses jurisdiction over the National Science Foundation.¹⁰ If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Sara Palasits or Albert Hinman with the Committee's Minority staff at (202) 225-6375. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Zoe Lofgren
Ranking Member
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology



Haley Stevens
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Research & Technology



Emilia Sykes
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight

CC: Brian Babin
Chairman
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Chairman Jay Obernolte
Subcommittee on Research & Technology

Chairman Rich McCormick
Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight

⁹ [119 First Session House Rules](#).

¹⁰ *Id.*