

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4805

April 21, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me regarding the important work CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) does to improve and monitor the health care of our coal miners in West Virginia. During our discussion, I was pleased you agreed with me that the work happening at NIOSH is unique across the federal government. Now, I ask that the Department bring back not only the functions of the NIOSH coal offices and programs, but also some of the specialized employees impacted by the April 1 HHS-wide Reduction in Force (RIF) who do this important work in Morgantown, West Virginia.

The NIOSH facility in Morgantown is known for its research aimed at preventing work-related injuries and illnesses, particularly in coal miners. The NIOSH Mining Program works to eliminate mining fatalities and injuries. Research on rock dust has resulted in safety changes to prevent explosions in underground mines. NIOSH research has also resulted in industry standards for pillar design and roof support programs to prevent collapses in underground mines. NIOSH's Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Program (CWHSP) studies respiratory disease and provides black lung screenings to coal miners. It is my understanding that the RIF impacted every employee in these important programs.

There are specialized labs at the NIOSH facilities in Morgantown where dedicated scientists with years of training had been researching coal and silica dust along with black mold. This research stands not just to make the mining industry safer but also to benefit workers exposed to silica dust at construction sites and residents in West Virginia and North Carolina impacted by the devastating flooding from Hurricane Helene. With all the scientists and employees that work in these labs impacted by the RIF, the CDC will be starting the process to decommission the Morgantown labs in the coming days. Decommissioning the labs will cost millions of taxpayer dollars. If the labs were to later be brought back online, additional taxpayer dollars would be spent to re-comply with numerous regulations and inspections.

Earlier this month, I was honored to join President Trump, along with miners from West Virginia, at the White House as he signed Executive Orders to support the coal industry and

unleash American energy. The President's Executive Orders are welcome news for our miners and will help ensure all Americans have access to affordable and reliable energy resources like coal. As the President recognizes the importance of coal, we must also recognize the health of our miners and I encourage you to bring back the NIOSH coal programs and researchers that will help ensure the President's vision to unleash American energy can be done safely.

I believe in the President's vision to right size our government, but I do not think eliminating the NIOSH coal programs and research will accomplish that goal. The mission and work conducted by the specially trained NIOSH employees is not duplicative of any other government program. I am concerned that the RIFs at NIOSH will undermine the vital health programs important to so many West Virginians. I urge you to bring back the NIOSH employees immediately so they can continue to support our nation's coal industry.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and I look forward to continuing to work with you to Make American Healthy Again.

Sincere regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Shelley Moore Capito". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shelley Moore Capito  
United States Senator