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March 20, 2025

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump,

I write with deep concern over the ongoing avian flu (“bird flu”) outbreak and its impact on human health, agriculture, and food prices. Since taking office, you have gutted public health agencies responsible for addressing the avian flu outbreak, withdrawn from the World Health Organization, defunded biomedical research into avian flu, and censored critical public health communications. More recently, Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. outrageously proposed “letting the virus run through the flock” – an idea lambasted by scientists, veterinarians, and public health officials as being dangerous and nonsensical.¹ Rather than condemn this absurd proposal, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) embraced the idea, which would inevitably lead to more bird deaths, higher food costs, and more deadly mutations.

Earlier this week, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) at the United Nations called the avian flu threat “unprecedented” and warned of “serious impacts on food security and food supply,” including “increasing costs to consumers.”² Americans have already felt the pain of these increased costs: one report estimates skyrocketing egg prices have already cost consumers \$1.4 billion, pricing this staple out of reach for far too many families for far too long.³ Further, this warning comes on the heels of the deadlier H7N9 strain being discovered for the

¹ Mandavilli, Apoorva, “Kennedy’s Alarming Prescription for Bird Flu and Poultry Farms,” New York Times, March 18, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/18/health/kennedy-bird-flu.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>.

² “FAO Warns of ‘unprecedented’ Avian Flu Spread, in Call for Global Action | UN News,” United Nations, March 17, 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/03/1161186>.

³ Boak, Josh and Josh Funk, “Egg prices could jump 41% this year, USDA says, as Trump’s bird flu plan is unveiled,” Associated Press, February 26, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/record-egg-prices-usda-bird-flu-virus-92e9f5fbc4e0a792be484a4aee5b9c16>.

first time since 2017 on a farm in Mississippi.⁴ Simply put, this outbreak, which has cost American families more at the grocery store, is dangerously close to costing them their health and safety as well.

Despite the seriousness of this threat from both a public health and economic perspective, top officials tasked with handling the outbreak for your Administration are putting forth alarming and deadly views about bird flu containment that are disconnected from reality. In recent interviews, Secretary Kennedy promoted the idea of “letting [the virus] run through the flock so that we can identify the birds, and preserve the birds, that are immune to it.”⁵ Experts warn that this would only fuel the crisis, allowing the virus ample opportunities to mutate and eventually develop the ability to spread more easily among humans.⁶ Further, chickens and turkeys lack the genes necessary for immunity and in the unlikely event that a bird did survive the disease, it would be prohibited from being sold.⁷ Instead of fact-checking Secretary Kennedy, USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins endorsed his plan, proposing a possible pilot program.⁸ Such unchecked and unscientific proposals by your Administration endanger farmers, exacerbate the outbreak, raise food costs, and ultimately threaten human health.

While these recent proposals from Secretaries Kennedy and Rollins are alarming, they are in line with your Administration’s continued attacks on expert-based public health responses to the bird flu. You recently gutted the White House Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy (OPPR), which was established by Congress in direct response to your mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic, by reducing their staff from 20 individuals down to one.⁹ OPPR was responsible for coordinating the White House response to the bird flu up until you took office. A source claimed that the OPPR now exists “in name only” and “has fallen into the abyss.”¹⁰

You have also withdrawn from the World Health Organization (WHO), the global organization that responds to disease outbreaks, and fired key staffers working at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and USDA.¹¹ In one embarrassing instance, fired federal workers within USDA’s National Animal Health Laboratory Network were frantically asked to come back to work when it became clear they

⁴ De La Hamaide, Sybille, “US reports first outbreak of deadly H7N9 bird flu since 2017.” Reuters, March 17, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-reported-first-outbreak-h7n9-bird-flu-farm-since-2017-woah-says-2025-03-17/>.

⁵ Mandavilli, Apoorva, “Kennedy’s Alarming Prescription for Bird Flu and Poultry Farms,” New York Times, March 18, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/18/health/kennedy-bird-flu.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Goodman, Brenda, “As Bird Flu Continues to Spread, Trump Administration Sidelines Key Pandemic Preparedness Office,” CNN, March 17, 2025, <https://amp.cnn.com/cnn/2025/03/17/health/pandemic-preparedness-office-trump-bird-flu>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Huang, Pien, and Will Stone, “Health agencies lose staff members in key areas as Trump firings set in,” NPR, February 17, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/02/17/nx-s1-5300052/federal-employees-layoffs-cdc-nih-fda>

were essential to containing this outbreak.¹² Instead of bolstering these key agencies and giving them the resources they need to protect the American people, you have spent the first weeks of your term demonizing and haphazardly firing federal workers and career experts who are instrumental to containing the threat of avian flu.

The communications and funding freezes previously announced at key agencies working to end the bird flu outbreak have also impacted our response. Your censorship of government agencies blocked key studies on the bird flu from being distributed and your funding freeze “led to the cancellation of various scientific meetings and led to delays and confusion for researchers in the process of getting grants approved to study things like bird flu.”¹³ More recently, NIH announced that key grants intended to address vaccine hesitancy – a critical public health problem – were cancelled.¹⁴

Public health agencies need robust funding and adequate staffing levels to ensure the bird flu does not grow. That is why I am equally baffled and outraged that Republicans are eager to gut federal public health funding. Republicans’ proposed cuts - \$1.8 billion or nearly 20 percent¹⁵ – to CDC this fiscal year would have devastated our ability to prevent and respond to this public health crisis.

The American people cannot afford another deadly, costly pandemic on your watch. Yet you have made it harder to address this threat while top officials in your Administration push unproven and dangerous solutions. I look forward to your response rejecting these unscientific proposals, protecting disease experts and biomedical research from funding cuts or layoffs, and outlining your overall strategy to combat the avian flu.

Sincerely,



¹² Smith, Allan, et al., “USDA says it accidentally fired officials working on bird flu and is now trying to rehire them,” NBC News, February 18, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/doge/usda-accidentally-fired-officials-bird-flu-rehire-rcna192716>.

¹³ Hlavinka, Elizabeth, “Trump Administration’s Communication Freeze Restricted Access to Critical Bird Flu Information,” Yahoo News, February 2, 2025. <https://www.yahoo.com/news/trump-administration-communication-freeze-restricted-14006439.html>.

¹⁴ Stein, Rob and Will Stone, “NIH cuts funding for vaccine-hesitancy research. mRNA research may be next,” NPR, March 12, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/03/12/nx-s1-5325863/nih-trump-vaccine-hesitancy-mrna-research>.

¹⁵ Master, Sonali and David Reich, “House Republican Bills Deeply Cut Programs That Help Low-Income People and Underserved Communities,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, November 22, 2025, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-budget/house-republican-bills-deeply-cut-programs-that-help-low-income-people-and>.

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator