

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 31, 2025

Mr. Jason Gray
Acting Administrator
United States Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Acting Administrator Gray:

We write with deep concern over recent steps the Trump Administration has taken at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Administration's decisions to place senior leaders throughout the agency on leave; to terminate ongoing programs without reviewing their efficacy and value simply because of how they were labeled under the previous Administration; and to freeze ongoing foreign assistance without engaging in meaningful consultation and transparency with Congress—including to ensure compliance with the law—have created a maelstrom of problems that have put our nation at risk and undermined American credibility around the globe.

We strongly object to the arbitrary sidelining of career foreign service and civil service experts. We understand that the Trump Administration placed a number of senior officials, including the Counselor to the Agency, the Acting General Counsel, and members of the Senior Executive and Foreign Services on paid administrative leave without cause. Additionally, personnel actions, including stop-work and termination orders, have been issued to some employees and hundreds of contractors who support the Agency's critical mission. Congress has mandated a merit-based hiring system to ensure that personnel are selected based upon their ability to perform the job and carry out USAID's mission in an unbiased way that best serves the public interest.

Democrats in Congress have consistently supported reforms to USAID, including responsible reviews of the efficacy of assistance programs. We understand that any Administration has the right to evaluate programs. While many in the United States have focused on the constitutional transition of power that took place earlier this month, the crises of the world did not stop. Russia still seeks to conquer Ukraine in the largest conflict in Europe since World War II, the people of Sudan are facing famine and genocide, and the PRC continues to advance its revisionist agenda. The Administration failed to notify or consult with Congress on these decisions, undermining Congress's important constitutional duty to conduct oversight of funding, personnel, and the nation's foreign policy. It is imperative that we maintain an independent development voice and capability within the U.S. government. USAID is, by statute, an independent establishment outside of the State Department. Any proposal to modify that structure would require an Act of Congress.

We welcome the Administration's subsequent decision to allow for waivers for lifesaving humanitarian and health assistance, but the majority of foreign assistance remains frozen, including programs critical to our national security. The pause in energy assistance for Ukraine is weakening their defense as Russia is advancing on the battlefield and Afghan allies—who supported the U.S. mission in Afghanistan—are stranded on U.S. government platforms. Freezing these programs makes Americans less safe and puts at risk our ability to compete with adversaries like China, Russia, and Iran.

The aid freeze also blocks global health security programs, including monitoring of bird flu in 49 countries, just as we are struggling to contain an outbreak in the United States. It is also preventing a U.S. response to the new Ebola outbreak in Uganda's capital, a city of 1.9 million people with an active international airport. Programming to support 90 million women and children to get vaccinations, prenatal care, safe childbirth resources, and contraception and the flagship PEPFAR program—with a historic record of success battling HIV and AIDS—remains paused. Not only will lives be lost, but we are also ceding ground to China, damaging our standing in the world at a time of heightened geopolitical competition.

If the United States is going to prevail in great power competition, we cannot afford to take a timeout from USAID programs that have long served to advance U.S. foreign policy goals. America needs to be active, and we must lead through our example.

We ask for responses to the following inquiries by February 10, 2025:

1. In carrying out this executive order and stop-work orders, what are the national security implications and the impact on beneficiaries of the pause in foreign assistance for each of these programs: PEPFAR, Global Health Security, Maternal-Child Health, Title II Food Assistance, Family Planning, and economic assistance for Ukraine, Jordan and Lebanon.
2. What impact will the foreign assistance pause have on our ability to compete with China? Do you anticipate China will utilize this opening to assert its priorities and fill the funding gap in countries where the United States has withdrawn its support?
3. A list of all programs subject to the foreign assistance pause or stop-work orders; the criteria used to pause the programs; as well as any waivers that have been granted, including in which countries they operate, and the amount and year of funding.
4. A list of all of the employment actions, across all hiring mechanisms that USAID has taken in response to the Executive Orders and how are you ensuring compliance with the law as USAID implements the Executive Orders.
5. A list of all persons (including position title, bureau or independent office) since January 20, 2025, placed on administrative leave, issued stop-work orders, or otherwise terminated from their position. Provide the legal rationale for each personnel action.
6. A list of all programs, affinity groups and initiatives that have been suspended and any other actions taken in response to the President's Executive Order on ending DEI programs.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
U.S. Senate



Gregory W. Meeks
Ranking Member
House Foreign Affairs Committee
U.S. House of Representatives



Brian Schatz
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State and Foreign
Operations
Senate Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate



Lois Frankel
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security,
Department of State, and Related Programs
House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives

CC: Secretary of State Marco Rubio