

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

September 10, 2025

The Honorable Russell Vought
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Vought:

We write to express our concern regarding the impact of the January 20, 2025, hiring freeze¹ on the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). It has recently come to our attention that lab personnel may not be exempt from this federal hiring freeze. As such, we are concerned that DEA lab personnel, to include chemists, fingerprint analysts, and evidence specialists, are not exempt from the hiring freeze, or at minimum that there is not clarity on whether they are exempt. We are further concerned about the impact this may have at the DEA's Manchester Field Office and its future New England Lab.

The New England Lab will be the eighth regional DEA laboratory and will specialize in both chemistry and latent fingerprint identification. While the current staff is based at the Manchester Field Office in Bedford, NH, lab personnel will move to the New England Lab after construction is completed. The lab will serve the entire New England region and provide critical analysis of drug evidence.

The DEA intends to employ more than 50 people at this lab; however, they currently employ only five chemists and fingerprint analysts. If lab personnel are not exempt from the hiring freeze, the DEA is prohibited from hiring additional staff for these positions or promoting individuals to supervisor positions. With the lab intending to analyze more than 5,000 drug exhibits each year, the New England Lab would be severely understaffed to accomplish their critical mission of protecting public safety.

A January 20 memo² from your office following President Trump's Presidential Memorandum instituting the hiring freeze to heads of executive departments and agencies stated that "Positions related to immigration enforcement, national security, or public safety" would be exempted from the freeze. Although there is clarity that most DEA positions are exempt under these guidelines,

¹<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/hiring-freeze/>

²<https://www.opm.gov/media/zkebfxow/omb-opm-federal-civilian-hiring-freeze-guidance-1-20-2025-final.pdf>

there is clear confusion on the status of lab personnel positions. It is crucial that the Administration exempt lab personnel because the DEA faces data analysis backlogs, hampering the DEA's ability to prosecute major drug crimes, identify new and emerging trends, and respond to drug threats in a timely manner.

Lab personnel such as fingerprint analysts, chemists, and evidence specialists are critical to DEA's efforts to enforce laws and enhance public safety. If the DEA's New England lab is not fully and appropriately staffed, the agency will continue to be hampered in investigating and prosecuting drug crimes. We urge you to exempt all DEA lab personnel and other positions critical to catching major drug traffickers from the hiring freeze. We look forward to your response.

CC: Attorney General Pam Bondi
DEA Administrator Terrance Cole

Sincerely,



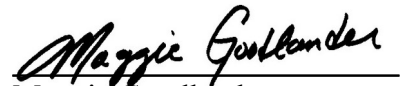
Chris Pappas
Member of Congress



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Maggie Goodlander
Member of Congress