

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 30, 2026

The Honorable Lee M. Zeldin
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Zeldin,

In light of recent evidence showing a violation of constitutional and whistleblower rights, we demand that you reverse the firings and disciplinary actions imposed on employees for signing a "Declaration of Dissent" in defense of scientific integrity, whistleblower rights, and constitutional protections.

On June 30, 2025, approximately 270 current and former EPA staff signed a "Declaration of Dissent" letter acting as private citizens to raise concerns about the abandonment of public health protections and the politicization of science. The language of the letter clearly states that the employees were signing in their personal capacity. EPA has not produced any evidence that would indicate that EPA employees used official resources or otherwise were acting in their professional capacity in writing and signing the "Declaration of Dissent," nor has EPA provided a legitimate workplace-related justification for disciplining the signers of the letter that would possibly outweigh employees' free speech rights. In spite of this, on July 3, 2025, the agency notified approximately 140 signers of the letter that they were under investigation and put on administrative leave until further notice. After 80 days or more on administrative leave, EPA fired 20 EPA workers (including seven on probation) and suspended the rest.

EPA's retaliatory actions against "Declaration of Dissent" signers for commenting on matters of public concern – and doing so outside of their professional capacity – raises First Amendment concerns. It also removes protections for whistleblowers reporting on the reckless abandonment of EPA's core mission, in yet another example of this administration's efforts to undermine our democratic institutions and skirt accountability for illegal actions. The dissent letter criticized several of your policies, including:

- Moving to rescind PFAS "forever chemicals" drinking water standards.
- Dramatically rolling back chemical reporting requirements.
- Cutting research and staff budgets, including for toxicologists and environmental justice initiatives.

Recent documents and internal emails,ⁱ obtained through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests by E&E Newsⁱⁱ and analyzed by a legal watchdogⁱⁱⁱ and the employees union,^{iv} reveal that EPA ethics staff found no fault in employees signing the dissent letter. In early April, E&E News^v reported that an EPA personnel lawyer warned EPA political management that disciplining the employees for speaking out would trample their First Amendment rights. EPA leadership pursued discipline anyway. When the legal investigation into these employees failed to produce a valid case, the agency resorted to a vague charge of "Conduct Unbecoming of a Federal Employee" to justify retaliation against an employee for speaking out.

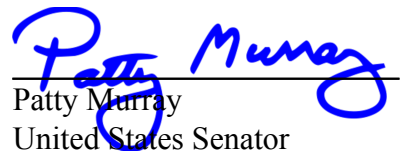
Even after the recent revelations from EPA legal counsel, EPA continues to retaliate against staff by upholding the suspensions of over 140 workers and the firing of 20 others. Overturning the punishments is crucial to prevent a chilling effect on free speech. Stifling dissent cripples the agency's ability to protect the public and is causing the loss of the experienced staff needed to carry out EPA's mission.

Given the lack of any evidence of wrongdoing whatsoever, we support the EPA employees' continued campaign to be exonerated and applaud them for the bravery it took to speak out about these matters of grave public concern. We call on you to reverse course, to reinstate all those who were fired for speaking out, and overturn all other discipline imposed. Speaking the truth is not a fireable offense. It is the public duty of every citizen who cares about protecting our health.

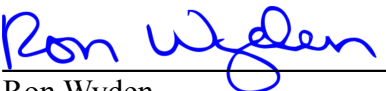
Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



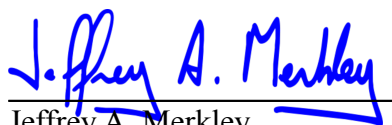
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



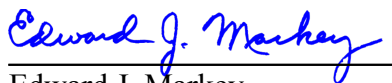
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



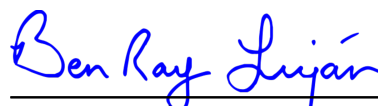
Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Andy Kim
United States Senator



Elissa Slotkin
United States Senator



Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator

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ⁱ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of General Counsel, Ethics Office, internal email correspondence regarding the “Stand Up for Science” petition, July 1–11, 2025, https://mcusercontent.com/5d5e50872dd1af3b8172cf48b/files/9bf8d4f6-6652-3b39-be43-2ba54ca2ae80/EPA_FOIA.pdf.

ⁱⁱ Kevin Bogardus, “Zeldin Disciplined EPA Dissenters after Ethics Office Found No ‘Concern,’” E&E News by POLITICO, March 11, 2026, <https://www.eenews.net/articles/zeldin-disciplined-epa-dissenters-after-ethics-office-found-no-concern>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, “Newly Released EPA Documents Support Employees Free Speech Rights,” March 13, 2026, <https://peer.org/newly-released-epa-documents-support-employees-free-speech-rights/>.

^{iv} American Federation of Government Employees Local 704, “EPA Union: Newly Revealed Documents Prove EPA Retaliated Against Employees Who Spoke Out,” March 12, 2026, <https://us3.campaign-archive.com/?u=5d5e50872dd1af3b8172cf48b&id=437f9d4411>.

^v Kevin Bogardus, “Trump EPA Punished Dissenters despite ‘Legal Risk’ Warning,” E&E News by POLITICO, April 2, 2026, <https://www.eenews.net/articles/trump-epa-punished-dissenters-despite-legal-risk-warning>.