

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 3, 2025

The Honorable Lee Zeldin
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Administrator Zeldin,

We are very concerned about reports of impending staff reductions within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Research and Development (ORD), potentially including the Great Lakes Toxicology and Ecology Division (GLTED) Lab in Duluth, Minnesota.

Firing career scientists and shutting down a lab that leads the nation in freshwater toxicology research would have huge impacts on Minnesotans and all Americans. Recent reporting by the *New York Times* indicates that the Department plans to fire up to 1,155 scientists from the ORD,¹ potentially including some or all of the over 130 in the Duluth GLTED Lab who conduct critical research on risks to our water and ways to keep it clean and safe.²

The research at the GLTED Lab directly supports EPA's top stated priority of providing "clean air, land, and water for every American" and is central to the Duluth community. Locally, it contributes over \$15 million to the economy and helps keep Lake Superior healthy.³ As one of the cleanest freshwater sources in the world, Lake Superior provides drinking water to cities from Duluth to Grand Marais, supports processing operations for our Iron Range taconite mines, and sustains tourism businesses along the North Shore. Minnesotans depend on Lake Superior's health to live, work, and enjoy recreation every day.

Because of the GLTED Lab's unique access to Lake Superior, it is well situated to address widespread water quality issues. Our entire country depends on the premier water testing protocols developed at this lab. In addition to testing, the dedicated scientists in Duluth have developed effective tools to combat polluted water and protect human health. This dedication to science as a public service has directly led to cleaner, safer drinking water for our kids and grandkids, and these efforts will continue to be critical for years to come. Simply put, closing the lab or firing its staff without proper cause would endanger future generations of Americans.

¹ Friedman, Lisa. (2025, March 17). *Trump Administration Aims to Eliminate E.P.A.'s Scientific Research Arm*. The New York Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/17/climate/trump-eliminates-epa-science.html>.

² Lovrien, Jimmy. (2025, March 20). *Duluth EPA Lab's Future Uncertain Under Plan to Cut Research Arm*. Duluth News Tribune. Retrieved from <https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/news/local/duluth-epa-labs-future-uncertain-under-plan-to-cut-research-arm>.

³ Factsheet from the U.S. EPA Office of Research and Development. (2021, January 19). Retrieved from https://19january2021snapshot.epa.gov/sites/static/files/2017-07/documents/at_a_glance_-_duluth_lab_public_7.7.17.pdf.

As such, we request you provide written answers to the following questions by April 11, 2025:

1. Will staff in Minnesota's Great Lakes Toxicology and Ecology Division Lab be included in the EPA's reduction in force plans? If so:
 - a. How many Minnesota GLTED Lab staff will be fired?
 - b. Please share a list of all Minnesota GLTED Lab staff who will be fired.
 - c. Please provide a breakdown of GLTED Lab staff who will be fired and i.) were recently promoted; ii.) are veterans; iii.) were probationary employees who were previously employed; iv.) by the Federal government immediately prior to their most recent role; v.) were probationary employees who were not previously employed by the Federal government
2. Is EPA assessing the public health and environmental impacts of these firings? Please share any assessments EPA has conducted or describe the methods in which EPA is conducting this assessment.
3. How will layoffs in EPA's Office of Research and Development impact long-term water quality, including its public health and ecological impacts? Please be specific.
4. What is EPA's plan to maintain clean air and water into the future should fewer scientists be dedicated to the issue? Please be specific.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,


Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator


Tina Smith
United States Senator