

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Ilhan Omar (MN-05)

Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

"Reclaiming OSHA's Mission: Ensuring Safety Without Overreach"

Thursday, May 15th, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for your testimony today.

Over the past 100 days, President Trump and his administration have decimated the very agencies and resources that keep workers safe and healthy. Now, Committee Republicans are following suit by holding this hearing to attack the work of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

We should all be able to recognize a basic truth: no job should ever be a death sentence. Workers deserve to come home to their families at the end of the day- not in pain, not in fear, but alive and well.

To protect that fundamental right, Congress passed landmark safety laws and established important agencies like OSHA, the Mine Safety and Health Administration, and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. But all three of these agencies have been chronically underfunded since their inception. And, largely because of that, they have long struggled to robustly defend workers from preventable injuries, illnesses, and death at work.

In the 54 years since it was established, OSHA has made great strides, but it remains hamstrung by an overly complicated regulatory process, persistent underfunding, and the long, uphill battle of updating standards to reflect scientific advances.

Despite these constraints, OSHA took action during the Biden Administration and proposed common-sense safeguards, like the heat stress rule, to prevent tragedies in the workplace. Rather than build on that progress, the Trump Administration is now threatening to dismantle any government program or agency that prioritizes workers' health and protects workers on the job.

At one point, DOGE targeted at least 11 OSHA field offices to be permanently shut down – including the only office in Louisiana, located in what is known as 'Cancer Alley' due to the presence of over 200 chemical plants and the high rates of cancer in the area.

MSHA had at least 30 field offices slated for closure on DOGE's hit list, including an office created in response to the Upper Big Branch Mine disaster. And while we face a surge in child labor violations, DOGE is still cutting staff and planning to close 20 Wage and Hour Division offices.

Shutting down field offices will endanger workers' lives by cutting off the public from DOL's most vital services. This also means severely limiting the geographic coverage of inspectors' and investigators' enforcement activities against law-breaking companies and further straining an already resource-strapped DOL. And it doesn't stop here.

On April 1st, nearly the entire NIOSH workforce was placed on leave, with the promise of being fired later this summer by HHS Secretary Kennedy. In one sweeping move, Secretary Kennedy put 50 years of scientific expertise and public health research at risk.

DOGE kicked out NIOSH staffers, paid them to *not* work, and then – after realizing that effectively eliminating NIOSH was a mistake – the Trump Administration started to reverse course and rehire only *some* of those staffers. This entire circus was wasteful, expensive, and harmful for workers; a description that could apply to most of DOGE’s actions.

Workers are not expendable. They are not a statistic. OSHA and NIOSH do the essential work of keeping workers safe. We must fund them properly and strengthen the laws the support their mission.

In my own district, we are already feeling the consequences of these cuts: The University of Minnesota’s Midwest Center for Occupational Health and Safety is one of just 18 NIOSH-funded Education and Research Centers in the nation. It trains the next generation of workplace safety experts in the region and helps protect our workers in high-risk industries.

Without NIOSH, the invaluable research and workforce development provided by that Center—and others like it across the country—will be lost. That means fewer trained medical and safety professionals, less research capacity to prevent fatal accidents, and, ultimately, more injuries, more deaths, and more grieving families.

Democrats are committed to honoring those workers who have been harmed or killed on the job, not just with words, but with action to change the system.

Recently, Ranking Member Scott, Representative Courtney, and I reintroduced the *Protecting America’s Workers Act* – a bill that would make long-overdue improvements to the enforcement of the *Occupational Safety and Health Act*. This bill would expand coverage to millions of workers currently excluded from the law’s protections and strengthen whistleblower protections. These reforms are critical to preventing the most serious violations that endanger workers’ safety.

Democrats are also championing legislation to protect healthcare and social service workers from violence, to make mining safer, and to prevent illness and injury from extreme heat.

This is what it means to have an agenda to ensure safety. And with that in mind, I hope that we can have a productive discussion today.

Thank you, and I yield back.