

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 22, 2025

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

Administrator Zeldin:

I write today to follow up on our conversation last week regarding Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS).

As you know, PFAS are man-made “forever” chemicals that are used in a variety of industry and consumer products and can lead to serious health effects. Under your leadership, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has purported to make combatting PFAS contamination a priority, and I share this priority.

PFAS pose a significant threat to our food supply, farming communities, and public health, making it critical that we take bold steps to understand and mitigate their impacts. Numerous Maine farmers have had their livelihoods disrupted due to PFAS contamination, and while Maine has been leading the nation in combating PFAS contamination, there is still much to learn and federal investments in research are essential to finding innovative solutions. In both the Fiscal Year 2023 and Fiscal Year 2024 government funding bills, I secured \$8 million for the EPA to work to further research on PFAS contamination in agriculture, and EPA awarded \$15 million in grant funding to ten institutions last September to research and reduce exposure to PFAS in agriculture.

Last week, EPA terminated these awards for allegedly being “no longer consistent with EPA funding priorities.” Not only is it illegal and unconstitutional to terminate this Congressionally appropriated funding, but these awards clearly align with the Agency’s priorities. For example:

- The University of Maine’s project: “Developing Integrated Mitigation Strategies to Help Farmers Reduce PFAS Risks in Forage and Livestock Systems” will produce actionable information for farmers, farm advisors, and policymakers in the U.S. to use in their short-term remediation efforts to PFAS contamination, as well as contribute critically needed data for longer-term remediation efforts to this widespread emerging class of pollutants.
- In another project involving the Mi’kmaq Nation, University of Virginia, Upland Grassroots and Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, research to quantify PFAS uptake into soil and crops from contaminated water will be used to develop remediation recommendations for producers to reduce PFAS bioaccumulation in crops and technologies for detecting PFAS on farms in soils and crops.
- The Passamaquoddy Tribe, specifically the Sipayik Environmental Department at Pleasant Point, project will assess PFAS in water and fish from watersheds in Tribal and disadvantaged regions of Northeastern Maine. This will help to inform community members so they can make health-based decisions about seafood consumption in an area that depends on recreational fisheries as food sources.

When I raised these terminations with you last week, you told me, *“It's something that's congressionally appropriated. The agency is going through a reorg. So the way that the program and these grants are going to get administered are going to be different going forward. But these are important grants – I look forward to working with you, and your team as we're able to continue that good work going forward.”*

Yet in [a statement provided to the *Maine Morning Star*](#) responding to a request on why these awards no longer align with Agency priorities, the EPA Press Office said: *“As with any change in administration, the EPA has been reviewing all of its grant programs and awarded grants to ensure each is an appropriate use of taxpayer dollars and to understand how those programs align with administration priorities. Maybe the Biden-Harris administration shouldn't have forced their radical agenda of wasteful DEI programs and 'environmental justice' preferencing on the EPA's core mission of protecting human health and the environment treating tribes and Alaska Natives as such.”*

Given these conflicting responses from EPA, I ask that you provide responses to the following by May 30th:

- Do you and the EPA consider tribes – which are sovereign governments to which we have trust and treaty responsibilities – “DEI”? If so, under what basis do you make that claim?
- Given the conflicting answers that I received regarding the PFAS grants, could you confirm that PFAS is a priority for the agency?
 - If PFAS is a priority, which I believe you have stated many times, please provide more information about why the above listed grants were terminated. They are not ‘DEI’ grants and they meet a key priority of the Agency so I would like some clarity as to the exact reasoning for these grant terminations.
 - If you determine these grants are in line with Agency priorities, please provide information on how and when these awards will be reinstated.
- Without grants that fund research and scientific advancement for PFAS remediation, how will the EPA make determinations about effective remediation for PFAS in agriculture, water systems, and contaminated lands?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations