

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

October 27, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra,

We are writing to conduct oversight of the Office of Climate Change and Health Equity (OCCHE) at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Created by HHS in August 2021¹ as part of President Biden’s “Climate Crisis” Executive Order,² this office appears to serve no other purpose than to expand the federal bureaucracy and divert federal taxpayer funds away from HHS’s core missions. It is troubling that the Biden Administration continues to use American taxpayer money to advance its radical Green New Deal agenda at a time of historically high inflation and energy prices.³ We request documents and information to determine how the Biden Administration plans to use taxpayer funds at the OCCHE.

President Biden’s budget request for FY2023 includes \$3 million for OCCHE.⁴ The Administration claims that transferring \$3 million from taxpayers to OCCHE will decrease the impacts of climate change,⁵ but it is unclear what this money will be used for other than to further expand the federal bureaucracy. According to the Administration, the requested \$3 million will fund eight additional full-time positions within OCCHE,⁶ positions currently filled—in the absence of any congressional approval for funds—by detailees from agencies like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and National Institutes of Health (NIH).⁷ HHS is planning to use even more taxpayer money to fund additional employees at OCCHE when detailees are already carrying out the functions of the office. Based on *Washington Post*

¹ 86 Fed. Reg. 48745 (Aug. 31, 2021).

² Exec. Order No. 14008, 86 Fed. Reg. 7619 (Jan. 27, 2021).

³ U.S. Bureau of Lab. Statistics, *Consumer Price Index – August 2022* (Sep. 13, 2022) (USD-22-1834).

⁴ The White House, Press Release, *President Biden’s FY 2023 Budget Reduces Energy Costs, Combats the Climate Crisis, and Advances Environmental Justice* (Mar. 28, 2022).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Maxine Joselow, *Congress Hasn’t Funded a Federal Office Focused on Climate, Health Equity*, WASH. POST (Jul. 29, 2022).

⁷ Ella Nilsen, *The Federal Office Focused on Health Impacts of Climate Crisis Has No Permanent Staff or Funding*, CNN (Jul. 8, 2022).

reporting about OCCHE, it appears that the office's mission is to spend taxpayer dollars on issues that other departments and agencies are tackling.⁸

Wasteful spending on a radical left-wing agenda is par for the course for this Administration and has led to historic inflation⁹ while Americans are experiencing declining real wages.¹⁰ Sadly, this is not the only crisis Americans face. In the midst of an economic crisis, it is unconscionable that the Biden Administration continues to spend millions on a duplicative office while a rising number of teenagers across the United States are dying from fentanyl¹¹ flowing across this Administration's open borders. With a staggering amount of fentanyl being seized at the border¹² and an unprecedented number of fentanyl-related deaths,¹³ our Committee and Americans alike are confounded as to why this Administration is focused on spending on new offices such as OCCHE rather than tackling the fentanyl crisis and saving American lives.

Instead of reversing course, the Administration has doubled down on its failed economic policies fueled by wasteful spending and a disregard for taxpayer money. In fact, the President's FY2023 budget was filled with exorbitant federal spending on its radical Green New Deal agenda, including \$44.9 billion marked for climate initiatives.¹⁴ It raises serious questions as to why HHS is now spending millions of taxpayer dollars and expanding the federal bureaucracy when Americans are struggling to pay their energy bills, buy gas and groceries, and pay for transportation to and from work.

To assist Committee Republicans in conducting oversight and to provide transparency into the Biden Administration's use of taxpayer money on the OCCHE, please provide the following documents and information no later than November 10, 2022 covering the time period January 20, 2021 to the present:

1. All documents and communications relating to the creation of the OCCHE;
2. All documents and communications relating to the intended use of \$3 million in taxpayer funds at the OCCHE;
3. All documents and communications referring or relating to the scope of the OCCHE's legal and policymaking authority;

⁸ Joselow, *supra* note 6 (*According to Wash. Post, OCCHE is: "tasked with marshaling federal assistance for Americans sweltering under deadly heat waves, breathing dangerous wildfire smoke, fleeing massive flooding and struggling to access clean drinking water amid a historic drought parching the West"*).

⁹ Aila Slisco, *Larry Summers, Who Predicted Biden's Inflation Misssteps, Expects Recession*, NEWSWEEK (Jul. 22, 2022).

¹⁰ U.S. Bureau of Lab. Statistics, *Real Earnings Summary* (Sep. 13, 2022) (USDL-22-1835).

¹¹ Tina Reed, *America's Fentanyl Problem a Growing Threat for Teens*, AXIOS (Sep. 16, 2022).

¹² U.S. Dep't of Justice, Press Release, *Fentanyl Seizures at Border Continue to Spike, Making San Diego a National Epicenter for Fentanyl Trafficking; U.S. Attorney's Office Prioritizes Prosecutions and Prevention Programs* (Aug. 11, 2022).

¹³ Drug Enforcement Admin., Press Release, *DEA Warns of Increase in Mass-Overdose Events Involving Deadly Fentanyl* (Apr. 6, 2022).

¹⁴ The White House, *supra* note 4.

The Honorable Xavier Becerra

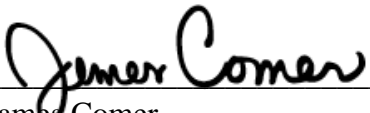
October 27, 2022

Page 3 of 3

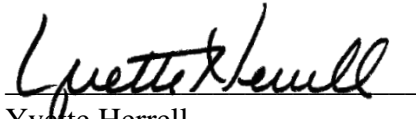
4. All documents and communications containing a list of personnel currently employed or detailed to OCCHE, or any document referring to an individual who is intended to become an employee or detailee to OCCHE.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. To make arrangements to deliver documents or ask any related follow-up questions, please contact Committee on Oversight and Reform Republican Staff at (202) 225-5074. The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

Sincerely,



James Comer
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Yvette Herrell
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Environment

cc: The Honorable Carolyn Maloney, Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform

The Honorable Ro Khanna, Chairman
Subcommittee on Environment