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BRAD GRANTZ, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR
LILA HARPER HELMS, DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

United States Senate
**COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION**
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125
WEBSITE: <https://commerce.senate.gov>

April 30, 2025

The Honorable Keith Sonderling
Acting Under Secretary for Minority Business Development Agency
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Acting Under Secretary Sonderling:

On March 25, 2025, and April 17, 2025, we sent letters to Secretary Howard Lutnick raising serious concerns about the apparent dismantling of the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), despite his testimony before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation stating he would not support doing so. In our April 17 letter, we requested specific documents and information that would help address our outstanding questions and concerns regarding the MBDA.¹ On April 24, 2025, we received a letter from the Department of Commerce (DOC) Acting Assistant Secretary for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs purporting to respond to our April 17 letter. This response, however, contained a mere three sentences related to the MBDA and failed to answer or meaningfully address any of our requests.² Given Secretary Lutnick's apparent disregard for our concerns about the Department's actions against the MBDA, we are now requesting you provide documents and information related to this inquiry.

Since our most recent letter, our offices have obtained information demonstrating that DOC has canceled all MBDA grants—further dismantling an agency Congress statutorily authorized, despite Secretary Lutnick's testimony to the contrary. In one MBDA termination notice reviewed by our offices, the Department claims the grant is being terminated because it “is unfortunately no longer consistent with the agency's priorities and no longer serves the interests of the United States and the MBDA Program.” The termination notice further states that, “MBDA is repurposing its funding allocations in a new direction in furtherance of the President's agenda.” Beyond these conclusory assertions, however, the notice is silent about why the grants are inconsistent with the MBDA's priorities and programs—which Congress, not the Department, set

¹ Hearing, “Nomination Hearing – U.S. Secretary of Commerce”, *U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation*, (Jan. 29, 2025); https://www.commerce.senate.gov/2025/1/full-committee-nomination-hearing_2_3.

² Letter from Department of Commerce, Assistant Secretary for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, to Ranking Member Maria Cantwell (Apr. 24, 2025)

by statute. And it suggests the DOC or others in the Administration may be using funding appropriated for the MBDA for other, unrelated purposes.

Raising further concerns, the termination notice was signed by Nate Cavanaugh—who we understand to be part of the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)—and is signed “Under the Authority of Keith Sonderling, Acting Undersecretary of MBDA.” Mr. Cavanaugh has reportedly been interviewing employees at the General Services Administration and overseeing efforts to dismantle another agency, the U.S. Institute of Peace.³ The termination notice indicates that Mr. Cavanaugh now has a DOC e-mail address. This raises significant questions regarding Mr. Cavanaugh’s precise role at DOC and the mechanism by which you or other members of DOC leadership delegated him authority to terminate MBDA grants on behalf of the Department. Our offices have also obtained information indicating you may not have been aware these termination notices were being sent out by Mr. Cavanaugh under your authority, which would raise further questions about who is actually running the Department: Secretary Lutnick or Elon Musk and DOGE?

Given the lack of responsiveness from the Department to date, we reiterate the requests raised in our April 17, 2025 letter, and request the following additional documents and information no later than May 14, 2025:

1. A complete description of Mr. Cavanaugh’s position at DOC, including his title, job description, date(s) of employment, any salary, any benefits, supervisor, and direct reports. Please also identify all other federal e-mail addresses assigned to or used by Mr. Cavanaugh of which you are aware.
2. Documents sufficient to show Mr. Cavanaugh’s delegated authority to execute termination notices to MBDA grantees.
3. Documentation sufficient to show your appointment as Acting Under Secretary for Minority Business Development Agency and the date of such appointment.
4. A complete description of your decision to delegate your authority to Mr. Cavanaugh for the purpose of terminating MBDA grants, including the extent to which Secretary Lutnick or any other senior DOC official was involved in making this decision.
5. A complete description of the types of funded activities that are considered “consistent with the agency’s priorities” and “serve[] the interests of...the MBDA program.”

³ “The People Carrying Out Musk’s Plans at DOGE”, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/02/27/us/politics/doge-staff-list.html>; see also “28-Year-Old DOGE Goon Installed as Head of Agency That Dared to Defy Musk”, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/28-year-old-installed-as-head-of-the-us-institute-of-peace-which-defied-doge/>

6. A detailed explanation of how the MBDA intends to “repurpos[e] its funding allocations in a new direction in furtherance of the President’s agenda,” including any specific program or activity that has received or is expected to receive repurposed funding.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member



Tammy Baldwin



Lisa Blunt Rochester



Brian Schatz



Edward Markey



Ben Ray Luján



Andy Kim



Martin Heinrich