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March 11, 2025

House Judiciary Committee
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol Building
120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

Subject: House Judiciary Committee Hearing – Impacts to Alaska by Wrongful Terminations of Federal Probationary Employees

Dear Chairman Gray and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to share my story. My name is Tiffanie Cross, and I live in Denali Park with my husband, a retired U.S. Coast Guard Rescue Swimmer who began his career at Air Station Kodiak, and our twin 9-year-old children. I'm here today because I was wrongfully terminated from my dream job as a Statistician and Program Analyst with NOAA Fisheries' Office of Science and Technology, and I want to speak about how this action has impacted my family—as well as the potential consequences for Alaska's fisheries.

For seventeen years, I have worked as a fisheries scientist, designing and improving data collection programs to support sustainable fisheries management. I dedicated over ten years to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute before taking the leap to join NOAA Fisheries. This position at NOAA was what I had worked toward my entire career—an opportunity to apply my skills at the federal level to ensure that the best possible data inform our nation's fisheries management decisions.

In my role, I provided support and coordination for a national recreational fisheries data collection partnership, managing program operations, delivering analytical products, and ensuring timely and quality communication with internal and external stakeholders. This partnership continually works to improve a national network of recreational fisheries surveys used to produce catch statistics—critical data that support sustainable fisheries while optimizing fishing opportunities for the public.

As part of the NOAA Fisheries Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), I represented MRIP on the Pacific Coast Recreational Fisheries Information Network (RecFIN) Technical Committee and served as a liaison to state partners, including Alaska. The RecFIN Technical Committee is responsible for reviewing and developing guidance on data collection efforts, survey design, estimation methods, and data management tools. It also helps identify and prioritize regional needs for improving fisheries data.

Wildlife because I trusted in the federal hiring process and the protections it promised. Now, I have nothing.

I urge this Committee to consider the real human and economic consequences of wrongful terminations like mine. This isn't just about one job—it's about the integrity of public service, the sustainability of our fisheries, and the livelihoods that depend on them.

Thank you for your time. I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Tiffanie Cross
Former Statistician and Program Analyst
Fisheries Statistics Division
NOAA Fisheries Office of Science & Technology

March 12, 2025

Dear Chair Gray and Committee Members,

My name is Hannah Ragland, and I am writing to you from Healy, Alaska. Thank you for elevating awareness on impacts of federal workforce layoffs with this hearing and opportunity for comment. My comments are my own, I am not currently employed, and I do not mean to make statements that suggest otherwise.

These random termination decisions are harmful for employees like me who invest in our Alaskan communities through our federal employment and livelihoods. I am one of around 100 qualified and high-performing National Park Service employees in Alaska who were in their probationary period and terminated on February 14. More federal workers have been cut before and since in other federal agencies in Alaska, in many different avenues of work. We had no chance to wrap up work or transition duties in a way to minimize impacts. I cannot understand why someone from Washington DC would make false accusations about the performance of thousands of people in a generic letter in the name of efficiency.

After nearly 20 years of life around Denali National Park, I was excited to accept a position as a Supervisory Park Ranger, starting on June 2, 2024. I worked for 16 years at the local school in Healy, starting as support staff, and working online through the University of Alaska system to become a certified teacher. I worked as a teacher for 9 years. My connections to the local schools and years of experience fostering science curriculum and place-based learning experiences helped me feel confident taking on responsibility for Denali National Park's Education Program (focused on youth learning) and to manage the Murie Science and Learning Center for youth and adult visitors.

On February 14, 2024, I received an email message from someone who is not associated with me in any way (or in my chain of supervision) suggesting that I had failed in my performance. The email stated: "The Department determined that you have failed to demonstrate fitness or qualifications for continued employment because your subject matter knowledge, skills, and abilities do not meet the Department's current needs, and it is necessary and appropriate to terminate, during the trial period, your appointment to the position of Supervisory Park Ranger (I), at Denali Park, Alaska, within the National Park Service." This form letter, sent to 100 Alaskan NPS employees on the same day, came from Lena McDowall, former Deputy Director of Management and Administration for the National Park Service. The same or similar language was used across federal agencies.

The person who sent the email to terminate me was not my direct supervisor, I have not met them in any capacity, and they misrepresented my performance. From my supervisor, I have received two performance appraisals, one for FY24 and the last on the day of my termination. On both evaluations I scored Outstanding ratings - the highest level possible. Ironically, the performance award I received came in the form of leave hours that disappeared with my termination. Beyond evaluations, I have been dedicated to fostering positive partnerships with local partners, schools, and neighboring communities, and my character and work can be confirmed by many. For these reasons I stated my disagreement with the decision and allegations about my performance on the notice from Ms. McDowall that I was told to sign and return to my supervisor.

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Hello

I worked as a contractor for 3 years around the state before landing my permanent federal position with NOAA Fisheries. I worked as an observer on commercial fishing vessels of all kinds (AFA and Am80 trawlers out of Dutch Harbor, catcher vessels out of Kodiak, processing plants in areas like King Cove and Sand Point, and longline vessels). I was hired 3/26/2024 with NOAA Fisheries to run our Anchorage field office, but did not begin work until 5/6/2024 (therefore, the date of my probationary period end) since I had to permanently relocate from Illinois to Anchorage for the position, which took time to plan and significant expenses, for which I did not receive relocation assistance compensation. I am thousands of dollars in debt from the move here, which places me with a significant undue financial burden now that I no longer have a job.

My job with NOAA Fisheries entailed:

- Ensuring the daily health and safety of our at-sea scientists. I was responsible for maintaining our safety equipment, such as Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) which have been essential during at-sea emergencies to save the lives of not only scientists, but also industry crew members.
- Providing in season support and sampling assistance to these scientists at sea. I also monitored their data in season and verified it for accuracy and compliance with proper sampling standards. This data is used in real time by stock assessors to manage quotas, and also by industry to track bycatch rates of crab, salmon, and halibut, and help inform their fishing efforts.
- I processed collected specimens, such as salmon genetics samples, which are used for tracking the populations of various salmon species crucial to Alaska's livelihood and culture.
- -This data is used to monitor populations to help ensure that fishermen are able to have prosperous seasons year after year. The tracking of bycatch helps ensure there are salmon in streams for decades to come. It also assists the tourism economy, as many of these target species (ie salmon, halibut) are highly sought after by recreational and sport fishermen.

There were three people in my office doing this work. Two of us were probationary and terminated on 2/27, leaving only one person left to do this important work. The other employee works almost exclusively as the EM supervisor. Now, his time will be split between field office support duties and managing the Electronic Monitoring program,

I have been working as a federal biologist most of my adult life, first as a seasonal, then as a term employee, sometimes as a student, and after working hard to get a PhD, I became a permanent federal employee 10 years ago. I am committed and work hard. I trusted that I had a secure job and would retire in 3 years at age 62.

On February 14th when I learned that skilled coworkers with dreams and families were being suddenly fired for fake reasons, I was in shock and so upset. Since then it has been one confusing, degrading action after another. You don't treat people that way. But you especially don't treat your own citizens that way, or your own federal service employees.

It has been a huge distraction from work and life, as my husband and I, both federal workers, frantically try to prepare for decisions that we may face next. We are given little time to decide and do not know what alternatives we might have later, if any. What kind of government actually seeks to demoralize and traumatize their citizens? Why call a war on your own people? Even though I remain focused on my work during the work day, there are disruptions. And you cannot help being constantly worried.

It feels terrible. Each of us has had moments, male or female, where we break down and cry as we realize how our lives, our coworkers lives, and our life work will be affected. I can't take the early retirement because I don't have 20 qualified years as a "permanent" employee. I don't want to take a fork or a VSIP. I may be able to keep my job, but I don't know. I am learning that with RIF, I could bump a coworker out of their job if mine is taken and I have seniority. It is awful, and some people seem to be entertained by this.

There was no emergency that required this quick and cruel approach. We all want a fair and efficient government work force and would welcome good leadership to make improvements where they may be needed. Why is my government trying to throw us on the streets like they don't care?

It is truly crazy.

With respect,

Karen Hutten