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September 25, 2026

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

Dear Administrator Zeldin,

I write to express my deep concern regarding the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) closure of the Region 6 lab in Houston. Despite having nearly a decade to plan for the lab's consolidation with EPA's lab in Ada, Oklahoma, EPA ordered the Houston lab to halt essential functions last month without articulating a plan to ensure the continuity of the lab's responsibilities. Given EPA estimates that the Ada lab will not be fully equipped to handle the Houston lab's responsibilities until an unspecified date in fiscal year 2027 (FY 2027), this is deeply troubling.

The Region 6 Laboratory in Houston is a full-service analytical lab which serves Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. In 2019, EPA announced it would close the Region 6 Houston Laboratory and relocate its employees to another facility 400 miles away in Ada, Oklahoma, in response to the 2016 *Federal Assets Sale Transfer Act*. The most recent EPA estimates indicate that the consolidation will be completed during FY 2027.¹ The Houston lab is a newer facility built in 1990 and is being consolidated with an older facility built in 1966, which has undergone major renovations. EPA personnel communicated to my office during a meeting on September 9, 2026, that a total of \$52 million has been spent to renovate the Ada lab, including funding specifically to accommodate the consolidation of the Houston lab. EPA estimates that closing the Houston lab will result in only \$3.5 million in rental cost avoidance annually.²

¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *Fiscal Year 2027 Justification of Appropriation Estimates for the Committee on Appropriations*, December 2026, <https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2026-04/epa-fy27-congressional-justification.pdf>.

² U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *Fiscal Year 2027 Justification of Appropriation Estimates for the Committee on Appropriations*.

Houston is home to a large number of chemical plants and refineries, and this lab and its highly trained staff are essential to EPA's mission of protecting human health and the environment. In the case of extreme weather events, these scientists are among Houston's essential first responders. Many EPA inspectors working on the Hurricane Harvey emergency response were based out of the Houston Lab. Moving the lab to a remote area exposes real infrastructure and logistics issues, which threatens Houston's access to the critical air, water, and soil testing performed at the lab and the return of results as quickly as possible. Ada is hours away from the two closest airports and the area is prone to ice storms and tornadoes. When a disaster occurs, we don't have days to determine if our public drinking water is contaminated. The lab's Houston location allows for samples from industrial accidents and natural disasters along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico to be raced to the lab for analysis. In 2019, the EPA Inspector General (IG) issued a report investigating the EPA response to Hurricane Harvey, which found that the EPA needs to improve its emergency response to air quality concerns during disasters.³ The loss of important EPA staff will negatively impact emergency response in the future, just as our community experiences more intense and frequent storms and other natural disasters.

Closing this lab will also result in further loss of skilled public servants. EPA plans to offer some current Houston lab employees the opportunity to relocate to the Ada lab, but I have heard from lab employees that they are concerned about uprooting their lives and their families and may choose to leave the EPA. EPA has already lost nearly 25 percent of its employees since January 2025 thanks to the Trump administration's cuts, jeopardizing the environmental health of communities across the country.⁴

Closing the Houston lab is ill-advised and I have advocated against it for years. At a minimum, EPA should present a comprehensive plan for how the lab's functions will be carried out as this consolidation with Ada occurs. However, EPA ordered the lab to stop processing new samples on August 28, 2026, and EPA personnel communicated to my office during a meeting on September 9, 2026, that the Ada lab will not take over the Houston lab's functions for several months. EPA has not articulated a plan for how new samples will be processed or how emergencies will be managed during this interim period. In the September meeting, EPA officials shared that EPA has the option to contract with non-government labs or process samples in neighboring regions and that some undetermined staff working on emergency response and criminal investigation will remain in Houston, but has yet to present a clear, vetted plan for how this would function. This is unacceptable and dangerous. With no plan in place, Houston and

³ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Inspector General, Report #20-P-0062, *EPA Needs to Improve Its Emergency Planning to Better Address Air Quality Concerns During Future Disasters*, December 16, 2019, https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2019-12/documents/epaig_20191216-20-p-0062.pdf.

⁴ Marianne Lavelle & Peter Aldhous, "EPA Hits 40-Year Lows in Staffing After Trump Targets Its Public Health Experts," *Inside Climate News*, March 6, 2022, <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/06032026/trump-epa-staffing-lows/>.

Region 6 residents cannot feel confident that the air they breathe and the water they drink will be safe if an industrial accident or natural disaster occurs.

In light of these concerns, I request that EPA holds a public meeting in Houston by the end of 2026 to detail its plans for the continuity of the Region 6 Houston lab's functions and receive input from impacted stakeholders and the public. Additionally, I request answers to the following questions by October 30, 2026:

1. Has EPA developed a plan to ensure continuity of the Region 6 lab's functions during the period from August 28, 2026, when the lab stopped processing new samples, to when the Ada lab is fully operational? If it has:
 - a. Please provide the details of this plan.
 - b. On what date was this plan approved and which EPA official(s) approved it?
 - c. Did EPA conduct any outreach to emergency management officials, public health officials, local governments, and other stakeholders for input this plan? Please provide the specific individuals and organizations EPA received input from.
 - d. Which specific non-government labs does EPA intend to contract laboratory services with during this interim period? Please provide a summary of these labs' technical capabilities and a comparison to the Houston lab's technical capabilities.
 - e. Which specific labs located in EPA's other regions—if any—does EPA intend to use to process samples originating from Region 6 during this interim period? Please provide a summary of these labs' technical capabilities and a comparison to the Houston lab's technical capabilities.
2. EPA personnel communicated to my office during a meeting on September 9, 2026, that EPA intends to conduct 15 management-directed reassignments from the Houston lab to the Ada lab. Which exact roles will be offered reassignments? Given the history of staff declining these reassignments, how will EPA ensure adequate staffing in the Ada lab? Will EPA hire an equal number of staff in the same positions?
3. EPA personnel communicated to my office during a meeting on September 9, 2026, that EPA intends for 16 Houston lab employees primarily focused on "emergency response and criminal investigations" to remain in Houston. Which exact roles will remain in Houston? What facility will they work from? Will this facility undergo any renovations to accommodate the additional staff?
4. When will EPA communicate, in detail, its plans regarding management-directed reassignments to the Ada lab and relocating remaining staff to another Houston facility to the Houston lab's current employees?

5. Once the Houston and Ada lab consolidation is complete, how will EPA ensure samples from the coast of the Gulf of Mexico are transported and processed in Ada in a timely manner?
6. What impact will the Houston and Ada lab consolidation have on the processing time of samples from the coast of the Gulf of Mexico? What, if any, analysis has been conducted on the potential public and environmental health impacts of delays caused by the consolidation? What was the result of this analysis?
7. EPA personnel communicated to my office during a meeting on September 9, 2026, that the consolidation of the Houston and Ada labs will result in no detrimental impact on Region 6's analytical capability. Please provide data substantiating this claim.

Houstonians and other Region 6 residents deserve transparency and accountability from EPA about the impact of closing this lab and EPA's plan to ensure their safety. I look forward to receiving your answers to these questions.

Sincerely,



Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress