

HHS Says It Cut Union Ties, Unbeknown To The Unions

By **Braden Campbell and Beverly Banks**

Law360 (August 22, 2025, 9:12 PM EDT) -- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services said it's joined the list of federal agencies to cut ties with the unions representing its workers, although those unions said Friday they haven't been informed of any such rebuke.



The American Federation of Government Employees, along with the National Treasury Employees Union, said it did not receive word directly from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that the agency would no longer be recognizing the union as representing its workers. (Photo by Zach D Roberts/NurPhoto via AP)

In a statement shared with Law360 this week, HHS said it had notified the National Treasury Employees Union and American Federation of Government Employees that it no longer recognized them as the representatives of workers in several divisions, invoking the president's March 27 executive order to cancel contracts with unions. The agency withdrew recognition from the unions on Aug. 15 and evicted them from its facilities, it said.

But representatives of the NTEU and AFGE said HHS had not notified them of the cancellations, although AFGE said it had caught wind of the agency's announcement to the press. The group condemned the agency's "intention" to cut ties Friday.

"Tearing up our contracts is a disservice to every American who benefits from the programs and services our members deliver," AFGE National President Everett Kelley said in a statement. "But let me be clear: our union isn't going anywhere."

In a statement accompanying the de-recognition announcement, HHS representative Andrew Nixon said the cancellations strengthen "our ability to respond rapidly to public health threats, advance national security, and deliver results for the American taxpayer."

The agency said it had de-recognized unions representing workers in its Office of the Secretary and Office of the General Counsel; the U.S. Food and Drug Administration; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response; the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases; the National Institutes of Health; the Office of Refugee Resettlement; and the Administration for Children and Families.

The agency's announcement is in line with President Donald Trump's **late March order** to cancel union contracts at dozens of agencies. The order invoked a provision of the labor relations scheme covering federal workers allowing the president to excuse agencies from their bargaining obligations to protect national security.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service, and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and Federal Emergency Management Agency, which are part of the Department of Homeland Security, **canceled their contracts** earlier this month.

The cancellations follow **an August 1 decision** by the Ninth Circuit to stay the last of three remaining district orders blocking certain agencies from implementing the president's directive. Labor groups including the AFGE and NTEU have filed a series of lawsuits challenging the executive order, arguing it exceeded Trump's powers by excusing from bargaining a glut of agencies that don't perform national security work, and that the president's rebuke was retaliation for the unions opposing his policies. At the time the groups filed these challenges in the spring, Trump administration officials directed agencies not to cancel contracts until the end of the litigation.

The AFGE disputed HHS' claim that canceling these contracts will make the agency more effective, saying the contracts ensure that the CDC and its National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health "maintain a stable, experienced, and supported workforce."

"Canceling our CBAs and gutting our workforce at the same time weakens CDC's readiness and makes America less safe and less healthy," AFGE Local 1916 Vice President Brendan Demich said in a statement.

--Additional reporting by Hailey Konnath and Rae Ann Varona. Editing by Nick Petruncio.