

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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March 29, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Ave SW  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

I write with serious concern that the Trump Administration is endangering the nation's public health by undermining routine vaccinations. As the United States faces deadly outbreaks of influenza and measles, it is more important than ever that the federal government take the necessary steps to ensure vaccines are available and accessible. Despite these public health developments, under the Trump Administration the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has forced out the top vaccine official at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA); cancelled or postponed vaccine advisory committee planning, which is essential to develop the annual influenza vaccine; cancelled grants and research designed to make vaccines more available and accessible within our communities; and prevented HHS scientists from publishing information about the spread of emerging diseases. I urge HHS to act to immediately resume its critical work to make available recommended vaccines, including by restoring the required advisory committee planning and reversing the termination of research grants.

Since January 20, 2025, HHS has taken several actions to delay access to vaccines and block vaccine-related research:

- On March 28, 2025, Dr. Peter Marks, Director of the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, the FDA's most senior vaccine official, resigned after being notified by an HHS official that he would be fired if he did not resign. In his resignation letter he reportedly stated: "It has become clear that truth and transparency are not desired by the Secretary, but rather he wishes subservient confirmation of his misinformation and lies."<sup>1</sup>
- On March 10, 2025, Michelle Bulls, Director of the Office of Policy for Extramural Research Administration at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) sent an internal email directing the termination of dozens of research grants

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<sup>1</sup>*Top F.D.A. Vaccine Official Resigns, Citing Kennedy's 'Misinformation and Lies'*, New York Times (Mar. 28, 2025) (online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/28/health/fda-vaccines-rfk-jr-peter-marks.html>)

awarded to scientists studying the uptake of vaccines and vaccine hesitancy.<sup>2</sup> This email reportedly informed HHS personnel that going forward “it is the policy of NIH not to prioritize research activities that [focus on] gaining scientific knowledge on why individuals are hesitant to be vaccinated and/or explore ways to improve vaccine interest and commitment.”<sup>3</sup>

- On February 26, 2025, FDA cancelled a March 13 meeting of the Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee, where the panel would select which seasonal flu strains should be included in this fall’s vaccine. FDA typically holds these meetings in the spring so that vaccine manufacturers have sufficient time to produce vaccines before the fall.<sup>4</sup>
- In February 2025, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indefinitely postponed a meeting of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, a body that meets three times a year to advise the CDC Director on how FDA approved vaccines should be utilized, including who should be vaccinated and when. According to public reporting, the body was set to discuss respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and flu vaccines, as well as vaccination protocols for several emerging illnesses.<sup>5</sup>
- On January 21, 2025, Acting Secretary of Health and Human Services Dorothy Fink issued a directive requiring HHS personnel to “refrain from publicly issuing any document or communication until it has been reviewed and approved by a Presidential appointee.”<sup>6</sup> This directive led to the immediate cancellation of advisory panel meetings held by federal health agencies and prevented the CDC from publicly sharing data on the spread of highly pathogenic avian flu.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *NIH to terminate or limit grants related to vaccine hesitancy and uptake*, Washington Post (Mar. 10, 2025) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/health/2025/03/10/vaccines-nih-rfk-research-canceled/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2025/03/10/vaccines-nih-rfk-research-canceled/)).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* Ms. Bulls’s email followed a late-February request by NIH Director Matthew Memoli that each of NIH’s institutes supply a list of current and future grants involving vaccine hesitancy. *NIH to ax grants on vaccine hesitancy*, Science (Mar. 10, 2025) (online at [www.science.org/content/article/nih-ax-grants-vaccine-hesitancy](http://www.science.org/content/article/nih-ax-grants-vaccine-hesitancy)).

<sup>4</sup> *FDA cancels meeting to select flu strains for next season's shots*, NBC (Feb. 26, 2025) (online at [www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/fda-cancels-meeting-select-flu-strains-seasons-shots-rcna19391](http://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/fda-cancels-meeting-select-flu-strains-seasons-shots-rcna19391)).

<sup>5</sup> *CDC vaccination committee meeting postponed days after RFK Jr. took over at HHS*, AP (Feb. 20, 2025) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/vaccines-cdc-rfk-trump-acip-74ad20e0a5430bfd6b48d35900c34d3>).

<sup>6</sup> *Federal Health Agencies Told to Halt All External Communications*, National Public Radio (Jan. 22, 2025) (online at [www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/01/22/nx-s1-5270866/hhs-cdc-healthcommunications-trump](http://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/01/22/nx-s1-5270866/hhs-cdc-healthcommunications-trump)).

<sup>7</sup> *Health Researchers Alarmed as Trump Administration Pauses Travel, Communications*, Washington Post (Jan. 23, 2025) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/health/2025/01/23/trump-administration-hhs-health-agencies-pause-travel-communications/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2025/01/23/trump-administration-hhs-health-agencies-pause-travel-communications/)); *Trump Administration Temporarily Mutes Federal Health Officials*, New York Times (Jan. 22, 2025) (online at [www.nytimes.com/2025/01/22/health/trump-health-communications.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/22/health/trump-health-communications.html)); Letter from Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, to Acting Secretary Dorothy Fink, Department of Health and Human Services (Jan. 31, 2025) (online at

CDC and FDA's decisions to cancel advisory committee planning required to develop and administer standard vaccinations represent an unexplained departure from scientific norms and make the United States less prepared to battle emerging infectious disease outbreaks, posing a severe threat to our collective public health. Both the FDA's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee and the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices are comprised of scientists and medical doctors and their work is evidence-based and efficacious. **Cancelling this essential planning leaves the United States less prepared to battle emerging infectious disease outbreaks and poses a severe threat to our collective public health.**<sup>8</sup>

As the President of the Infectious Diseases Society of America noted "cancelling a critically important Food and Drug Administration meeting that is vital to the development of effective vaccines for the next influenza season is irresponsible, ignores science and shows a lack of concern for the protection of the public from this potentially severe disease."<sup>9</sup> The United States is currently experiencing the worst influenza season in 15 years. At least 41 million Americans have gotten sick, leading to up to 1.2 million influenza hospitalizations and at least 23,000 deaths.<sup>10</sup> Because flu vaccines take several months to create, a prolonged delay in selecting strains for next year's vaccine threatens to leave the United States unprepared for the 2025-2026 flu season.<sup>11</sup> We also continue to face the threat of highly pathogenic avian flu, leading to at least 70 human cases and one death so far in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the critical role that standard vaccinations play in sustaining public health, you have repeatedly pushed widely debunked claims that vaccines cause autism and have spread misinformation that children of certain races and ethnicities do not need to be vaccinated against a multitude of illnesses.<sup>13</sup> The United States is experiencing a worsening measles outbreak. As part of this outbreak, at least one child has died from measles for the first time in ten years. Almost all of the cases in this outbreak are in unvaccinated individuals or individuals whose vaccination status is unknown—in Texas, only two out of 279 cases occurred in individuals who

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<https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-oversight.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2025-01-31.%20GEC%20to%20Fink-HHS%20re.%20Scientific%20Integrity.pdf>).

<sup>8</sup> *Health Experts Sound Alarm as FDA Cancels Key Vaccine Meeting*, U.S. News and World Report (Feb. 28, 2025) (online at [www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2025-02-28/health-experts-sound-alarm-as-fda-cancels-key-vaccine-meeting](https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2025-02-28/health-experts-sound-alarm-as-fda-cancels-key-vaccine-meeting)).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Preliminary Estimated Flu Disease Burden 2024-2025 Flu Season* (online at [www.cdc.gov/flu-burden/php/data-vis/2024-2025.html](https://www.cdc.gov/flu-burden/php/data-vis/2024-2025.html)) (accessed Mar. 19, 2025).

<sup>11</sup> *Health Experts Sound Alarm as FDA Cancels Key Vaccine Meeting*, U.S. News and World Report (Feb. 28, 2025) (online at [www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2025-02-28/health-experts-sound-alarm-as-fda-cancels-key-vaccine-meeting](https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2025-02-28/health-experts-sound-alarm-as-fda-cancels-key-vaccine-meeting)).

<sup>12</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *H5 Bird Flu: Current Situation* (online at [www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/bird-flu/situation-summary/index.html)) (accessed Mar. 13, 2025).

<sup>13</sup> *Senator calls RFK Jr.'s position on race and vaccines dangerous*, NPR (Jan. 30, 2025) (online at [www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/01/30/nx-s1-5281457/rfk-jr-vaccines-race-confirmation-hearings](https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/01/30/nx-s1-5281457/rfk-jr-vaccines-race-confirmation-hearings)).

have received the measles vaccine.<sup>14</sup> Yet when asked whether people should receive measles vaccines, you downplayed their safety and efficacy, saying “we don’t know what the risk profile is for these products.”<sup>15</sup>

I am deeply alarmed that you continue to sow doubts regarding the efficacy of vaccination. And given your public statements criticizing vaccines, I am deeply concerned that CDC’s and FDA’s decisions to cancel advisory committee meetings and withhold funding for vaccine research are based on politics and not grounded in science or public health. Any attempt by the Trump Administration to interfere with the CDC and FDA vaccine process runs contrary to HHS’s mission to “enhance the health and well-being of all Americans, by providing for effective health and human services and by fostering sound, sustained advances in the sciences underlying medicine, public health, and social services.”<sup>16</sup>

To protect public health and ensure access to safe, effective, and life-saving vaccinations for the American people, HHS should immediately restore all cancelled advisory committee planning and restore terminated research grants. I also request that you provide the following documents and communications no later than April 14, 2025:

1. All documents and communications related to the January 21, 2025 directive that HHS personnel “refrain from publicly issuing any document or communication until it has been reviewed and approved by a Presidential appointee”<sup>17</sup>;
2. All documents and communications relating to the decision to cancel or postpone CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices meetings;
3. All communications from Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. to HHS personnel regarding the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices;
4. All documents and communications relating to the decision to cancel or postpone FDA Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee meetings;
5. All communications from Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. to HHS personnel regarding the FDA Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee;
6. All documents and communications related to the March 10, 2025, email from Michelle Bulls, directing the termination of dozens of research grants awarded to scientists

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<sup>14</sup> *Texas measles outbreak grows to 279 cases, approaching nationwide total for 2024*, ABC (Mar. 18, 2025) (online at <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/texas-measles-outbreak-grows-279-cases/story?id=119905598>).

<sup>15</sup> *Kennedy Links Measles Outbreak to Poor Diet and Health, Citing Fringe Theories* (Mar. 10, 2025) (online at [www.nytimes.com/2025/03/10/health/measles-texas-kennedy-fox.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/10/health/measles-texas-kennedy-fox.html)).

<sup>16</sup> Department of Health and Human Services, *About HHS* (online at [www.hhs.gov/about/index.html#:~:text=The%20mission%20of%20the%20U.S.,public%20health%2C%20and%20social%20services.\)](http://www.hhs.gov/about/index.html#:~:text=The%20mission%20of%20the%20U.S.,public%20health%2C%20and%20social%20services.)) (accessed Mar. 29, 2025).

<sup>17</sup> *Federal Health Agencies Told to Halt All External Communications*, National Public Radio (Jan. 22, 2025) (online at [www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/01/22/nx-s1-5270866/hhs-cdc-healthcommunications-trump](http://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/01/22/nx-s1-5270866/hhs-cdc-healthcommunications-trump)).

studying the uptake of vaccines and vaccine hesitancy;

7. A list of all grants that NIH terminated or plans to terminate in connection with the March 10, 2025 email from Michelle Bulls;
8. All communications, including but not limited to all email correspondence and calendar invitations, sent or received by Dr. Peter Marks; and
9. All communications from Matthew Memoli to NIH personnel regarding termination of grants to study vaccine uptake or vaccine hesitancy.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X.<sup>18</sup> If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Democratic Committee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gerald E. Connolly", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gerald E. Connolly  
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman

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<sup>18</sup> House Rule X, clause 4(c)(2).