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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

July 29, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We write to initiate an investigation into your dangerous and unprecedented decision to remove all 17 members of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and replace them with individuals handpicked to advance your anti-vaccine agenda.¹ Alarming, these individuals—who include prominent vaccine deniers—have already taken steps to upend decades of scientific research and vaccine policy, threatening the health and safety of all Americans.

ACIP plays an essential role in ensuring Americans have access to affordable vaccines. The Committee carefully reviews scientific data to make recommendations about who should get which vaccines and when. Once the CDC Director adopts those recommendations, insurance companies and government programs like Medicare and Medicaid are required to cover the vaccines. The recommendations also inform which vaccines are provided for free through the Vaccines for Children program—which supplies vaccines to over half of the country's children.²

ACIP has made vaccine recommendations for over 60 years.³ Its members—who historically have been experts in vaccine science and public health—typically convene three times a year. At these meetings, they attend presentations on scientific data, discuss available evidence, and vote on vaccine recommendations. The meetings include non-voting representatives from medical and

¹ Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., *RFK Jr.: HHS Moves to Restore Public Trust in Vaccines*, U.S. DEP'T OF HEALTH & HUM. SERV. (June 9, 2025), <https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/wsj-kennedy-op-ed-restore-public-trust-in-vaccines.html>.

² Madeleine Valier, et al., *Vital Signs: Trends and Disparities in Childhood Vaccination Coverage by Vaccines for Children Program Eligibility* — *National Immunization Survey-Child, United States, 2012–2022*, 73(33) MORBIDITY MORTALITY WEEKLY REPORT (MMWR) 722–30 (2024), <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7333e1>.

³ *ACIP Charter*, CTRS. FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC) (Apr. 1, 2024), <https://www.cdc.gov/acip/about/acip-charter.html>; see also KAVYA SEKAR, CONG. RSCH. SERV., *IF12317, THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON IMMUNIZATION PRACTICES (ACIP)* (Feb. 2, 2023), https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/IF/PDF/IF12317/IF12317.1.pdf.

public health organizations and are open to the public to ensure transparency and promote confidence in ACIP's decisions.⁴

By removing all 17 of ACIP's members and replacing them with eight individuals handpicked to advance your anti-vaccine agenda, you have put decades of non-partisan, science-backed work—and, as a result, Americans' lives—at risk. For example, one of the new members, Dr. Robert Malone, advocated for the use of ivermectin over mRNA vaccines—which he described as “causing a form of [AIDS]”—during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ Earlier this year, he dismissed news reports attributing the deaths of two children to measles as “misinformation,” blaming “medical errors” instead.⁶ And this June, he said: “Some people believe that the term anti-vaxxer is a pejorative. I do not—I view it as high praise.”⁷

Other newly appointed members include Vicky Pebsworth, a board member of an anti-vaccine nonprofit, and Retsef Levi, a business school professor who has claimed that mRNA vaccines cause “an unprecedented level of harm.”⁸ Incredibly, several of these members also have significant conflicts of interest: both Dr. Malone and Dr. Martin Kulldorff, the new ACIP Chair, have testified as paid expert witnesses in lawsuits challenging vaccine safety.⁹ Another newly appointed member, Dr. Michael Ross, who is currently an operating partner at a private equity firm and not a clinical professor as you claimed, had to withdraw from ACIP due to his conflicts of interest.¹⁰

Just two weeks after you announced the appointment of these members, they convened and voted on vaccine recommendations.¹¹ On the first day of the meeting, the new ACIP stated that it plans to revisit the childhood vaccine schedule: the recommended series of vaccines given to children to protect them against infectious diseases.¹² This reexamination marks a significant departure from long-standing Committee practice and means that access to vaccines that children have received for decades—like hepatitis B and polio—is in danger.

⁴ ACIP Meeting Information, CDC (June 18, 2025), <https://www.cdc.gov/acip/meetings/index.html>.

⁵ *Uncovering the Covid Narrative with Dr. Robert Malone*, BRIGHT LIGHT NEWS (Mar. 26, 2022), <https://rumble.com/vzd954-full-interview-uncovering-the-covid-narrative-with-dr.-robert-malone.html>.

⁶ Robert W Malone, MD (@RWMaloneMD), X (Apr. 5, 2025, 7:38 PM), <https://x.com/RWMaloneMD/status/1908665463279677915>.

⁷ Robert W Malone, MD (@RWMaloneMD), X (June 9, 2025, 8:47 AM), <https://x.com/RWMaloneMD/status/1932056847327907955>.

⁸ Retsef Levi (@RetsefL), X (Jan. 30, 2023, 1:28 AM), <https://x.com/RetsefL/status/1619945525670981632>.

⁹ Will Stone, *Panel picked by RFK Jr. will scrutinize the vaccine schedule for kids*, NAT'L PUB. RADIO (June 25, 2025), <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/06/25/nx-sl-5445254/cdc-review-vaccine-schedule-children>.

¹⁰ Gina Cook & Aimee Cho, *Doctor who claimed to be current GW University professor leaves RFK Jr.'s vaccine panel*, NBC NEWS (June 25, 2025), <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/doctor-who-claimed-to-be-current-gw-university-professor-leaves-rfk-jr-s-vaccine-panel/3944482/>.

¹¹ *Supra* note 4.

¹² CDC, *Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) - Day 1 of 2* (YouTube, June 25, 2025), https://www.youtube.com/live/2PnYYb_xj3U.

On the second day of the meeting, the new ACIP voted to remove the preservative thimerosal from flu vaccines for children and adults.¹³ This was based solely on a presentation by a known vaccine denier and conspiracy theorist: Lyn Redwood.¹⁴ Ms. Redwood, the former president of the anti-vaccine organization you co-founded, has spread dangerous misinformation about vaccines for years. And now, because you stacked the Committee with vaccine deniers, that misinformation will impact what vaccines Americans can get.

Even more alarming are the administration's attempts to muzzle scientists. In the days before the ACIP meeting, CDC scientists posted a document to the agency's website outlining studies over the past 25 years showing that thimerosal in vaccines is considered safe.¹⁵ The document was abruptly removed before the meeting.¹⁶ When asked why the document was removed, newly appointed member Dr. Malone explained that it was "not authorized by the Office of the Secretary"—indicating that you or one of your staff had the document taken off CDC's website.¹⁷

What is particularly troubling about these developments is that there is no one at the CDC or the administration more broadly to serve as a backstop. Dr. Susan Monarez, President Trump's nominee for CDC Director, refused to acknowledge how dangerous it is to have vaccine deniers on ACIP during her hearing before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP Committee).¹⁸ And you have made clear that you are willing to circumvent procedure to advance your anti-vaccine agenda. Indeed, you unilaterally changed the recommendations for COVID-19 vaccines for children and pregnant women through an announcement on Twitter.¹⁹ Following your post, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) removed COVID-19 from the relevant recommended vaccine schedules, bypassing the ACIP process entirely.

The harm your actions will cause is significant. As your new ACIP makes recommendations based on pseudoscience, fewer and fewer Americans will have access to fewer and fewer vaccines. And as you give a platform to conspiracy theorists, and even promote their theories yourself, Americans will continue to lose confidence in whatever vaccines are still available.

¹³ CDC, *Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) - Day 2 of 2* (YouTube, June 26, 2025), <https://www.youtube.com/live/z-16flmZoEc>.

¹⁴ See Aria Bendix & Erika Edwards, *Anti-vaccine activist presents data to Kennedy's reshaped CDC advisory panel*, NBC NEWS (June 26, 2025), <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/anti-vaccine-activist-presents-data-rfk-jrs-reshaped-cdc-advisory-pane-rcna215201>.

¹⁵ Will Stone & Pien Huang, *RFK Jr.'s vaccine advisers raise disproven fears about the preservative thimerosal*, NAT'L PUB. RADIO (June 26, 2025), <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/06/26/nx-s1-5438485/cdc-acip-rfk-thimerosal-vaccines>.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Supra* note 13.

¹⁸ *Nomination of Susan Monarez to be Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services: Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Health, Educ., Lab., and Pensions*, 119th Cong. (2025), <https://www.help.senate.gov/hearings/nomination-of-susan-monarez-to-be-director-of-the-centers-for-disease-control-and-prevention-department-of-health-and-human-services>.

¹⁹ Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. (@SecKennedy), X (May 27, 2025, 10:16 AM), <https://x.com/SecKennedy/status/1927368440811008138>.

With lower vaccination rates, there will be a resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases such as hepatitis, meningitis, mumps, pertussis, pneumonia, tetanus, and varicella (chickenpox).²⁰ Indeed, the United States is currently experiencing the largest measles outbreak in 33 years, which has already resulted in the first deaths from the disease in the United States in a decade.²¹ Millions more lives are at risk from vaccine-preventable diseases if you continue to undermine vaccine access through ACIP. To get a sense of the scale, for the approximately 117 million children born in the United States during 1994–2023, routine childhood immunization prevented an estimated 508 million lifetime cases of illness, 32 million hospitalizations, and 1.129 million premature deaths from vaccine-preventable diseases.²² Globally, vaccines have saved at least 154 million lives over the past 50 years.²³

Finally, the decisions that you have made could exacerbate the significant health disparities in this country. Already, the bottom 50 percent of our population can expect to live seven years shorter lives than the top 1 percent.²⁴ If insurance companies, Medicare, Medicaid and other government programs stop covering vaccines, Americans will be forced to pay out of pocket. The only people who will be able to afford vaccines will be the wealthy.

The HELP Committee has jurisdiction over matters related to biomedical research and development and public health.²⁵ Your decision to fire non-partisan scientific experts and replace them with ideologues with a history of undermining vaccines is extremely dangerous and has put Americans' lives at risk. As members of the HELP Committee, we are committed to ensuring that vaccines remain accessible and affordable for all Americans. Accordingly, we request the following information by August 12, 2025.

1. For each ACIP member that was serving as of June 8, 2025, please state why they were removed from the Committee. Please include a description of their alleged conflicts of interest and an explanation as to how these alleged conflicts of interest are different from those the CDC previously disclosed.²⁶

²⁰ Sarah Talbird, et al., *Impact of Routine Childhood Immunization in Reducing Vaccine-Preventable Diseases in the United States*, 150(3) PEDIATRICS (2022), <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35821599/>.

²¹ Adria Mathis, et al., *Measles Update — United States, January 1–April 17, 2025*, 74(14) MMWR. 232–38 (2025), <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/74/wr/mm7414a1.htm>. See also Sophie Gardner, *The 2025 measles outbreak is largest in 3 decades*, POLITICO (July 8, 2025), <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/07/09/the-2025-measles-outbreak-is-largest-in-three-decades-00444186>.

²² Fangjun Zhou et al., *Health and Economic Benefits of Routine Childhood Immunizations in the Era of the Vaccines for Children Program — United States, 1994–2023*, 73(31) MMWR. 682–85 (2024), <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/mm7331a2.htm>.

²³ *Global immunization efforts have saved at least 154 million lives over the past 50 years*, WORLD HEALTH ORG. (Apr. 24, 2024), <https://www.who.int/news/item/24-04-2024-global-immunization-efforts-have-saved-at-least-154-million-lives-over-the-past-50-years>.

²⁴ Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP Committee) Minority Staff Report, *The Impact of Living Paycheck to Paycheck: Shorter Lives, More Stress* (Mar. 7, 2025) https://www.sanders.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/3.7.2025-Life-Expectancy-Working-Class-Report_final.pdf

²⁵ Standing Rules of the Senate XXV(l)(1).

²⁶ *Conflicts of Interest Disclosures of ACIP Members*, CDC (Mar. 7, 2025), <https://www.cdc.gov/acip/disclosures/by-member.html>.

2. Please provide a list of all individuals who were involved in the decision to remove the members of ACIP, both inside and outside HHS. Please include the individuals' names, titles, and current employers. Please also describe the involvement of the following people: former president of Children's Health Defense, Lyn Redwood; HHS contractor, David Geier; CDC Chief of Staff, Matt Buzzelli; and CDC Senior Advisor and former staffer to former Congressman David Weldon, Stuart Burns.
3. Please provide all communications, including but not limited to emails, internal messages, calendar invitations, and meeting notes (herein, collectively, "communications"), and all documents, including but not limited to memoranda, presentations, and reports (herein, collectively, "documents") concerning the appointment of the eight new ACIP members.
4. With respect to the eight new ACIP members, please answer the following questions:
 - a. How were the individuals identified?
 - b. What types of expertise were required?
 - c. What vetting process did the members undergo?
 - d. How were the final members selected?
 - e. Who at the CDC approved the final appointees?
5. For the seven active members of ACIP, please provide documentation that shows member completion of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics Form 450 and review and approval by the agency ethics official.
6. There has been public reporting that additional members will be appointed to ACIP.²⁷ Please confirm if additional candidates are under consideration at this time.
7. ACIP policies and procedures state that the quorum needed to hold a meeting and vote is half of ACIP's voting membership.²⁸ Given that the current ACIP only has seven members, this means that only four members would need to be present to hold a meeting and only three of those members would have to vote to restrict access to vaccines. Please clarify the following:
 - a. The number of voting members that must be present to have a meeting;
 - b. The number of voting members that must be present and eligible to hold a vote;
 - c. The number of members that must vote "yes" for a majority vote; and
 - d. How a voting ACIP member abstaining from a vote affects the vote count.
8. Consistent with ACIP's policies and procedures, agenda items are solicited from ACIP voting members as well as CDC and FDA staff 10 weeks prior to the meeting.²⁹ Given

²⁷ Ahmed Aboulenein, *Kennedy allows US Senator Cassidy a pick in revamped CDC vaccine panel*, REUTERS (June 13, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/us-health-chief-says-sen-cassidy-promised-pick-vaccine-panel-2025-06-12/>.

²⁸ ACIP, *Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices Policies and Procedures* (June 2022), https://www.cdc.gov/acip/downloads/Policies-Procedures-508_1.pdf.

²⁹ *Id.*

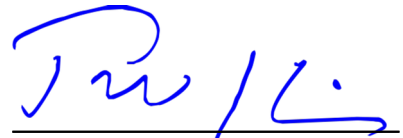
that all ACIP voting members were fired within 10 weeks of the June 25–26 meeting, please explain:

- a. Who suggested and approved agenda items for the June 25–26 meeting, including the item on thimerosal in vaccines;
 - b. Who selected Lyn Redwood as a presenter;
 - c. How ACIP presentations were reviewed, vetted, and approved by CDC or FDA subject-matter experts in advance of this meeting, particularly when the presenter was not a CDC or FDA employee; and
 - d. Why CDC’s document related to the safety of thimerosal was removed from the agenda and the ACIP website and who requested its removal.
9. On May 27, 2025, you announced that the COVID-19 vaccine would no longer be recommended for children and pregnant women. Please provide all relevant internal memoranda and attachments related to this decision.
10. On June 6, 2025, HHS entered into a contract with Brueckner Spitler Shelts PLC regarding the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program.³⁰ Drew Downing, a partner at this firm, has litigated multiple cases challenging vaccine safety. He is also listed in the HHS staff directory as a counselor in the Office of the Secretary.
- a. What is the purpose of this contract?
 - b. How was Brueckner Spitler Shelts PLC selected?
 - c. What is Drew Downing’s role at HHS?
 - d. Has HHS contracted with any other private law firms around the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program or vaccines more generally?

Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions



Tim Kaine
United States Senator

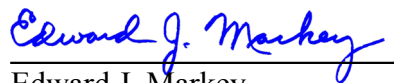


Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator





John Hickenlooper
United States Senator

³⁰ USA Spending, *Contract Summary PO PIID 75P00125P00036* (2025), https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT_AWD_75P00125P00036_7570_-NONE_-NONE-.


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Andy Kim
United States Senator


Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States Senator


Angela Alsobrooks
United States Senator