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September 8, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

On August 5, 2025, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced that it would no longer fund mRNA vaccine research and cancelled \$500 million in grants and contracts.¹ This decision was fueled by your delusional conspiracy theories about vaccinations and is a direct threat to the health and safety of the country. Robust vaccine development is vital to ensuring we are prepared to fight emerging health threats— your actions are careless and shortsighted and are eroding public trust. I urge you, in the strongest of terms, to cease your dangerous attacks on life saving research and continue federal funding for mRNA vaccines.

As you know, mRNA vaccines use genetic cells to train our immune system to fight a specific disease.² Despite your false accusations questioning the science backing mRNA vaccines, they are an extremely effective tool in protecting public health and can be developed more quickly than traditional vaccines. Strong investments in mRNA research led to the successful development of the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines which were instrumental in stopping the COVID-19 pandemic.³ While you continue to insist that the COVID-19 vaccine

¹ "HHS Winds Down mRNA Vaccine Development Under BARDA", Department of Health and Human Services August 5, 2025, <https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-winds-down-mrna-development-under-barda.html>

² "COVID-19 Vaccine Basics," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, September 3, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/covid/vaccines/how-they-work.html#:~:text=To%20trigger%20an%20immune%20response,immune%20response%20inside%20our%20bodies.>

³ Chris Byrer, "The Long History of mRNA Vaccines," Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, October 6, 2021, <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2021/the-long-history-of-mrna-vaccines>

is ineffective⁴, the reality is that they were instrumental in stopping the pandemic and saving lives. It is estimated that the vaccines prevented the deaths of 14.4 million people worldwide, including nearly 140,000 Americans at the height of the pandemic.⁵

Currently, there are clinical trials underway to develop mRNA vaccines for a range of diseases including Norovirus, Lyme Disease, Cytomegalovirus, HIV, and the Avian Bird Flu. This research is an opportunity to prevent future illnesses and offer hope to individuals with limited treatment options. Further, scientists continue to make incredible strides to apply mRNA science to other deadly and hard to treat illnesses, such as pancreatic cancer.⁶ The decision to cut federal investment in this research upends this progress and has been referred to by infectious disease experts as one of the most dangerous public health decisions in the last 50 years.⁷ Without investment in these vaccines now, the United States will be unprepared for the next pandemic and lose critical ground in the fight against cancer and other diseases. Ultimately, lives will be needlessly lost.

Additionally, in August, the Food and Drug Administration revoked the remaining emergency use authorization for COVID-19 vaccines and set severe restriction eligibility requirements.^{8,9} These new limits will undoubtedly lead to a rise in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations as patients are forced to jump through unnecessary red tape or forgo the vaccine altogether due to costs. Making this decision as the country prepares for an increase in COVID-19 cases this winter and against the recommendations of vaccine experts and public health organizations makes it clear that you are operating in bad faith and using your position to further your own beliefs and self-interest.^{10,11}

During your confirmation process you committed to my colleagues that you would maintain the Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices (ACIP) at the CDC¹², and yet, you went back on your word and removed all the members of the ACIP in June. You have since

⁴ “HHS Winds Down mRNA Vaccine Development Under BARDA”, Department of Health and Human Services August 5, 2025, <https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-winds-down-mrna-development-under-barda.html>

⁵ Lives saved by COVID-19 vaccines. *J Paediatr Child Health*. 2022 Sep 20;10.1111/jpc.16213. doi: 10.1111/jpc.16213. Epub ahead of print. PMID: PMC9537923.

⁶ Kaitlin Sullivan, “One-size-fits-all pancreatic cancer vaccine showed promise in early trial.” August 11, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/cancer/pancreatic-cancer-vaccine-prevents-recurrence-phase-1-clinical-trial-rcna223980>

⁷ The Associated Press, “RFK Jr. pulls \$500 million in funding for mRNA vaccine contracts.” NPR, August 5, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/08/05/nx-s1-5493550/rfk-jr-funding-mrna-vaccine-development>

⁸ David Lim, “FDA revokes emergency use of Covid-19 vaccines,” Politico, August 27, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/08/27/fda-revokes-emergency-use-of-covid-19-vaccines-00530626>

⁹ Madeleine Aggeler, “What you need to know about Covid vaccines in the US this fall.” *The Guardian*, September 2, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/wellness/2025/sep/02/what-to-know-covid-vaccine>

¹⁰ Sarah Bahari and Tracey McManus, “COVID-19 surges in Texas: What to know about new ‘Status’ variant,” *The Dallas Morning News*, September 2, 2025, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/public-health/2025/09/02/covid-19-surges-in-texas-what-to-know-about-new-stratus-variant/>

¹¹ Rob Stein, “The latest COVID vaccines come with new FDA limits,” NPR, August 27, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/08/27/nx-s1-5515503/fda-covid-vaccines-restricted>

¹² Adam Cancryn, Lauren Gardner, and David Lim, “RFK Jr. prepares shake-up of vaccine advisors.” Politico, February 20, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/20/kennedy-prepares-shakeup-of-vaccine-advisers-00205223>

replaced its members with individuals who include a board member for the National Vaccine Information Center – a group that is considered to be one of the leading sources of vaccine misinformation – and a former mRNA researcher who has gained a following for promoting conspiracy theories around the COVID-19 outbreak and the COVID-19 vaccine.^{13,14} In August, you went so far as to suggest that pediatricians vaccinate children in opposition to science in order to increase their profits.¹⁵ This is a dangerous lie, and considering the ongoing and deadly measles outbreak – spread in part due to low vaccination rates – it is astounding that you continue to so blatantly lie in an effort to sway parents into leaving their children unprotected.

In March, I wrote to you to express concern that you would allow your personal beliefs to prevent you from effectively leading HHS and safeguard the health and safety of the American people.¹⁶ The cancellation of mRNA vaccine research and the misguided recommendations only prove that my earlier concerns were warranted. Terminating mRNA vaccine research will impact our ability to respond quickly to future public health threats and threatens to set disease prevention and treatment back decades. Since your appointment as the Secretary of HHS you have placed your beliefs about vaccines above your mandate to act in the best interest of the overall health and wellbeing of the American people. The actions that you take are dangerous and are not harmless. Every day, people are diagnosed with illnesses that could be prevented – and possibly treated – with new vaccines spurred by robust federal funding. Turning your back on this research due to your own misguided understanding of science and vaccines will jeopardize countless lives and is a betrayal of your office and the health and wellbeing on the nation.

I demand you end the cancellation of these mRNA contracts and end your repeated anti-science actions intended to block Americans' ability to access lifesaving vaccinations.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate

¹³ Anna Kim Constantino, “RFK Jr.’s firing of CDC vaccine panel undermines science, could threaten public health, experts say,” June 10, 2025, CNBC, <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/06/10/rfk-jr-firing-of-cdc-vaccine-advisors.html>

¹⁴ Mike Stobbe, “RFK Jr. names 8 vaccine panel replacements, including a critic of COVID vaccines,” PBS News, June 11, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/rfk-jr-names-8-vaccine-panel-replacements-including-a-critic-of-covid-vaccines>

¹⁵ Madison Czopek, “Fact-checking RFK Jr.’s claim that pediatricians recommend vaccines for money,” PBS News, August 25, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/fact-checking-rfk-jr-s-claim-that-pediatricians-recommend-vaccines-for-money>

¹⁶ Richard Blumenthal “Blumenthal Demands Answers as HHS Secretary Kennedy Fails to Address Ongoing Measles Outbreak Undercuts Future Flu Response”, March 7, 2025, <https://www.blumenthal.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/blumenthal-demands-answers-as-hhs-secretary-kennedy-fails-to-address-ongoing-measles-outbreak-undercuts-future-flu-response>

