

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

July 6, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to you today regarding our deep concern about the effect of your Administration’s anti-science rhetoric on America’s public health during this deadly pandemic. For decades, administrations of both parties and Congress have upheld a bipartisan tradition of supporting core public health and science in this country. But since the onset of the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, you have repeatedly pushed politics over science to drive the federal government’s response to COVID-19 and personally spread inaccurate information regarding the virus and the steps necessary to effectively respond to it.<sup>1</sup>

Your Administration has limited the ability of its leading public health officials, including Dr. Anthony Fauci, and Dr. Robert Redfield and other top officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to share information about the pandemic with the public.<sup>2</sup> The White House intervened to prevent CDC guidance documents from being published, which would have helped states and communities across the country reopen more safely.<sup>3</sup> You personally promoted unproven treatments for COVID-19, including bleach and sunlight.<sup>4</sup> You repeatedly advocated for the use of an unproven treatment, hydroxychloroquine, and your Administration reportedly pushed the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to authorize the drug for emergency use against COVID-19, despite a lack of quality evidence supporting this regulatory action.<sup>5</sup> FDA’s authorization was eventually rescinded after multiple trials found the drug to be ineffective in treating the disease. You have even politicized the basic public health measure of wearing a mask while in public—one of the simplest, most effective ways to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 aside from social distancing—turning a sound and simple risk mitigation measure into an ideological debate.<sup>6</sup> Most recently, on Saturday, you even falsely claimed that “99 percent” of the cases identified are “totally harmless”<sup>7</sup> – an assertion that FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn could not defend.<sup>8</sup>

By your own admission, you told your “people” to slow down the nation’s testing capacity at a time when cases are surging to record levels across the country—while blaming the public health

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/health-chiefs-early-missteps-set-back-coronavirus-response-11587570514>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/with-trump-leading-the-way-americas-coronavirus-failures-exposed-by-record-surge-in-new-infections/2020/06/27/bd15aea2-b7c4-11ea-a8da-693df3d7674a\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/with-trump-leading-the-way-americas-coronavirus-failures-exposed-by-record-surge-in-new-infections/2020/06/27/bd15aea2-b7c4-11ea-a8da-693df3d7674a_story.html)

<sup>3</sup> <https://apnews.com/7a00d5fba3249e573d2ead4bd323a4d4>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/24/health/sunlight-coronavirus-trump.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/04/former-fda-leaders-decry-emergency-authorization-malaria-drugs-coronavirus>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/18/trump-says-some-wear-coronavirus-masks-to-signal-disapproval-of-him.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/05/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-factcheck.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/05/hahn-coronavirus-trump-infection-348954>

leaders you have sidelined.<sup>9 10</sup> Your Administration recently deprioritized a key position coordinating the whole of government response to expand COVID-19 testing capacity, a truly unfathomable move given the gaps our communities are still experiencing in testing capacity and access to supplies.<sup>11</sup> Your Administration has retaliated against officials who raise concerns with political interference and ignored proven scientific solutions.<sup>12</sup> As a result, a key post remains filled by an acting official during a time of unprecedented public health crisis when we need stable leadership more than ever.

It is increasingly clear that your attacks on science and public health leaders have emboldened state and local elected officials to adopt similar messages. Recent reports highlight a concerning trend of local public health officials either resigning or being pushed out of their jobs for standing up for public health and protecting data integrity.<sup>13</sup> The officials report the resignations are due to serious physical threats against themselves or their families from the public. In some instances, they are being pushed out by political leadership after refusing to go along with reopening plans they believed ran against sound public health practices<sup>14</sup> or refusing to manipulate public health data to fit a certain political narrative.<sup>15</sup> Your own willingness to ignore science in favor of political interest encourages and normalizes such inexcusable behavior, endangering the health of our communities.

The departures illustrate two pernicious trends with your Administration– the persistence and intensity of anti-science sentiment and the resulting vacancies in key leadership roles in the midst of the crisis. Your continued anti-science rhetoric has cost lives and continues to put the health and wellbeing of every person in this country at risk. It is particularly dangerous as we continue through a critical period when public health organizations must move full speed ahead with testing and tracing.

We urge you to reject anti-science rhetoric and instead prioritize actions that rely upon facts and data driven analysis in order to protect our nation as we continue to respond to this pandemic.

Sincerely,



---

Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Health Education  
Labor and Pensions



---

Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Chairman  
House Committee on Energy and  
Commerce

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/22/politics/donald-trump-testing-slow-down-response/index.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/23/trump-cdc-overhaul-coronavirus-335039>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/06/01/867431135/white-house-coronavirus-testing-czar-to-stand-down>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/28/climate/trump-coronavirus-climate-science.html>

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/amid-threats-and-political-pushback-public-health-officials-leaving-posts/2020/06/22/6075f7a2-b0cf-11ea-856d-5054296735e5\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/amid-threats-and-political-pushback-public-health-officials-leaving-posts/2020/06/22/6075f7a2-b0cf-11ea-856d-5054296735e5_story.html)

<sup>14</sup> <https://khn.org/news/public-health-officials-face-wave-of-threats-pressure-amid-coronavirus-response/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/west-virginia-gov-jim-justice-forces-out-top-health-official-n1232066> ; <https://khn.org/morning-breakout/florida-health-department-worker-claims-she-was-fired-for-refusing-to-manipulate-covid-data/>

cc: The Honorable Michael R. Pence, Vice President of the United States