

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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January 14, 2022

Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
395 E St SW
Washington, DC 20024

Director Walensky:

As the incoming Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), you promised the American people you would lead with “facts, science, and integrity.”¹ At a time of such fear and uncertainty, that commitment was critical to build trust with the public. But, you quickly abandoned that commitment to distort and ignore science, often to please Biden-Harris political donors. Our hope is that you recommit yourself to lead with “facts, science, and integrity” and work to rebuild the trust that you have lost. Unfortunately, under your leadership, the CDC has been in constant crisis:

- **School Guidance:** You issued guidance in February 2021 that required “six feet” of separation,² which kept kids locked out of school, despite recommending “three feet” to your hometown in July 2020.³ Prior to your guidance, others also suggested that three feet of separation was sufficient⁴ and that schools should remain open.⁵

¹ Rochelle P. Walensky, *As the New C.D.C. Chief, I'll Tell You the Truth*, New York Times, (January 11, 2021) available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/11/opinion/rochelle-walensky-cdc-director.html>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *K-12 School Operational Strategy* (updated Feb. 12, 2021), available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html>.

³ Jim Gerahty, *CDC Director: Oh, Wait, Never Mind, Three Feet of Distance in Schools Is Fine Again*, National Review (Mar. 19, 2021), available at <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/cdc-director-oh-wait-never-mind-three-feet-of-distance-in-schools-is-fine-again/>

⁴ Joseph Allen and Sara Bleich, *Op-ed: Reduce distancing requirement to keep kids in school*, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, (Nov. 12, 2020), available at <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/oped-reduce-distancing-requirement-to-keep-kids-in-school/>

⁵ Claire Cain Miller, Margot Sanger-Katz, and Kevin Quealy, *We Asked 175 Pediatric Disease Experts if It Was Safe Enough to Open School*, The New York Times (Feb. 11, 2021), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/11/upshot/schools-reopening-coronavirus-experts.html>

- **Misinterpreted Research:** You misinterpreted certain research that you relied on to publish your school guidance. Specifically, the authors claimed your guidance was an “example of fears influencing and resulting in misinterpretation of science and harmful policy” and called on you to loosen your rules to open schools immediately.⁶
- **“Partnership” with Teachers Unions:** In May 2021, emails revealed that your agency was politically compromised.⁷ Specifically, emails showed that you partnered with powerful teachers’ unions to draft your “scientific” school guidance. While teachers’ unions praised this guidance,⁸ children suffered.
- **Cruel Summer Camp Guidance:** In April 2021, you issued guidance for summer camps that required children to wear masks outdoors.⁹ Health experts characterized this guidance as “draconian,” “irrational,” “senseless,” “cruel,”¹⁰ and even Dr. Fauci believed it to be “strict” and “stringent.”¹¹
- **A Misleading CDC Number:** In April 2021, you needlessly worried the American public about outdoor transmissions. You misled the public when you announced that “less than 10 percent” of COVID-19 transmission occurred outdoors. To be clear, the share of transmissions that occurred outdoors were below 1 percent and possibly even below 0.1 percent.¹²
- **India Study:** In July 2021, you flip flopped on mask guidance for vaccinated persons recommending once again that vaccinated persons mask indoors. However, to support your reversal, among other sources, you cited unpublished data and a study performed in India that analyzed breakthrough infections related to vaccines not used or authorized for use in the U.S.¹³

⁶ Dr. Tara O. Henderson, Dr. Monica Gandhi, Dr. Tracy Beth Hoeg, Dr. Daniel Johnson, *CDC misinterpreted our research on opening schools. It should loosen the rules now.*, USA Today, (Mar. 9, 2021), available at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2021/03/09/cdc-school-opening-covid-rules-guidance-column/4628552001/>

⁷ Jon Levine, *Powerful teachers union influenced CDC on school reopenings, emails show* (May 1, 2021), available at <https://nypost.com/2021/05/01/teachers-union-collaborated-with-cdc-on-school-reopening-emails/>

⁸ American Federation of Teachers Press Release (February 12, 2021) available at <https://www.aft.org/press-release/afts-weingarten-cdcs-schools-reopening-guidelines>

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Guidance for Operating Youth and Summer Camps During COVID-19* (Updated Apr. 24, 2021) available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/summer-camps.html#print>

¹⁰ David Zweig, *Experts: CDC’s Summer-Camp Rules Are ‘Cruel’ and ‘Irrational’*, New York Magazine (May 4, 2021), available at <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2021/05/experts-cdcs-summer-camp-rules-are-cruel-irrational.html>

¹¹ Scott Stump, *Dr. Fauci calls CDC summer camp guidelines ‘a bit strict’*, Today (May 5, 2021), available at <https://www.today.com/health/dr-fauci-calls-cdc-summer-camp-guidelines-bit-strict-t217469>

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Christian Datoc, *Biden administration waves off GOP criticism of study cited in CDC’s new mask guidance*, Washington Examiner (July 30, 2021), available at <https://www.yahoo.com/now/biden-admin-waves-off-gop-145500128.html>

- **CDC’s Flawed Case for Wearing Masks in School:** On September 26, 2021, you went on CBS’s *Face the Nation*, and cited an Arizona study claiming that schools that did not have mask mandates were 3.5 times as likely to experience COVID outbreaks as ones that did.¹⁴ You repeated this claim in a White House briefing on September 28¹⁵ and tweeted it out again that afternoon.¹⁶ But, the study you relied on was deeply flawed and included schools that were not open.¹⁷ As one expert said, the study was “so unreliable that it probably should not have been entered into the public discourse.”¹⁸
- **Misleading Hospitalization Numbers:** On January 9, 2022, you revealed that “up to 40 percent” of hospital patients who have been counted as COVID hospitalizations were actually admitted.¹⁹ Even CNN anchor Jake Tapper took issue, criticizing the CDC for “misleading” the public. To date, you have not clarified how many of the more than 800,00 deaths in the U.S. were “from COVID” as opposed to “with COVID,” but you did suggest the “data will be forthcoming.”

These are just a few of the instances that demonstrate a pattern of distorting or ignoring science and misleading the American public by CDC, which undoubtedly has further eroded public trust in you and your agency. If you continue to lead the CDC for the Biden administration, we suggest you insulate your agency’s decisions from political pressures.

Given the tumultuous first year of your leadership at the CDC, we ask that you make yourself available for a briefing with Energy and Commerce Committee Republicans so that we can discuss with you the concerns of our constituents and explore ways in which you can rebuild trust with the American people. If it would make you more comfortable and likely to accept our request, we are willing to extend an invitation to the Democrats on our committee as well.

To make arrangements, please have your staff contact Bijan (BJ) Koohmaraie no later than January 28, 2022. Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

¹⁴ David Zweig, *CDC’s Flawed Case for Wearing Masks in School*, The Atlantic, (Dec. 16, 2021), available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2021/12/mask-guidelines-cdc-walensky/621035/>

¹⁵ White House COVID-19 Response Team Briefing, (Sept. 29, 2021), available at <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4989012/user-clip-walensky-az-study>

¹⁶ Rochelle Walensky, Twitter (Sept. 28, 2021), available at <https://mobile.twitter.com/cdcdirector/status/1442963327441719301>

¹⁷ David Zweig, Experts: CDC’s Summer-Camp Rules Are ‘Cruel’ and ‘Irrational’, New York Magazine (May 4, 2021), available at <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2021/05/experts-cdcs-summer-camp-rules-are-cruel-irrational.html>

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Brendan Cole, *Jake Tapper Rails Against ‘Misleading’ CDC COVID Hospitalization Numbers*, Newsweek, (Jan. 11, 2022), available at <https://www.newsweek.com/jake-tapper-cnn-cdc-rochelle-walensky-covid-gupta-1667833>

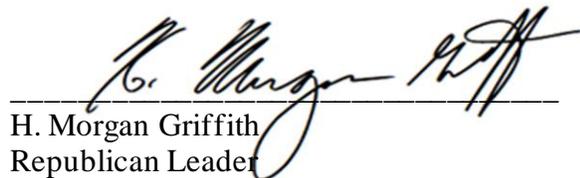
Sincerely,



Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Republican Leader
Committee on Energy and Commerce



Brett Guthrie
Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Health



H. Morgan Griffith
Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations