

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 20, 2017

The Honorable Eric D. Hargan
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dr. Brenda Fitzgerald
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, Georgia 30329

Dear Acting Secretary Hargan and Director Fitzgerald:

We write to inquire about recent reports that employees of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are prohibited from using certain words in budget documents. Although a Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) spokesman has said the alleged ban is, “[a] complete mischaracterization of discussions regarding the budget formulation process” we are gravely concerned about any effort to suppress the CDC’s *Guidance on Scientific Integrity*, which “[p]laces primary emphasis on scientific evidence for developing policies, guidelines, and recommendations.”^{1,2} Prohibiting the use of particular terminology appears to directly contradict that policy.

Despite science being at the core of the CDC’s work, the purported order to eliminate specific words politicizes research in a variety of areas and sets a precedent for further censorship. Further, striking “diversity,” “entitlement,” “evidence-based,” “fetus,” “transgender,” “science-based”, and “vulnerable” from 2019 fiscal year budget documents indicates to the scientific community and to the American public as a whole that support for public health research will be contingent upon passing an ideological test.

Following news of the supposed ban, Director Fitzgerald shared, “*You may be understandably concerned about recent media reports alleging that CDC is banned from using certain words in budget documents. I want to assure you that CDC remains committed to our public health mission as a science- and evidence-based institution.*”³ It’s unclear how CDC plans to reconcile the elimination of the terms “science-based” and “evidence-based” from its self-characterization as a science- and evidence-based institution.

Based on key research and outcomes data, the United States has advanced a national dialogue on ways to improve the health and well-being of diverse and vulnerable populations, including the transgender community and women, and has demonstrated the value of entitlement programs in providing access to quality and affordable care. Any explicit limitation of expression in these areas would be a step backwards from decades of progress.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/16/health/cdc-trump-banned-words.html>

² https://www.cdc.gov/od/science/docs/cdcsiguide_042516.pdf

³ <https://twitter.com/CDCDirector/status/942459036217245696>

Please provide the following information by January 3, 2018:

1. Has the CDC or its employees received any form of oral or written guidance or direction from HHS, the White House, or elsewhere in the administration discouraging use of certain words and phrases, including the words “vulnerable,” “entitlement,” “diversity,” “transgender,” “fetus,” “evidence-based” and “science-based”?
2. An article in the *Washington Post* suggested that Alison Kelly, a career CDC employee in the Office of Financial Services, led a meeting with other CDC personnel where the aforementioned list of words was discussed.⁴ Please explain where the request to discuss the aforementioned words with CDC personnel originated from, including by identifying the employee(s) within the Administration or White House who communicated about this issue with Alison Kelly.
3. Please provide copies of any and all physical documents distributed to CDC personnel at the December 14, 2017 meeting referenced in the *Washington Post* article and any emails sent to staff regarding this meeting.
4. Please identify any alternative words and phrases to “vulnerable,” “entitlement,” “diversity,” “transgender,” “fetus,” “evidence-based” and “science-based” that were suggested to CDC personnel during the December 14, 2017 meeting.
5. Does the guidance or direction on these words provided to CDC extend beyond conversations, processes and/or documents related to the President’s Fiscal Year 2019 budget proposal? If not, are there plans to broaden the scope of the guidance to include other aspects of the CDC’s work?
6. Does the guidance or direction on these words exclusively apply to CDC? Or does it extend to other parts of the HHS? Are there plans to extend this guidance to other parts of HHS in the future? Does the Administration plan to build upon the guidance or direction by discouraging use of additional terms at CDC or other parts of HHS in the future?

We look forward to your prompt response to our request. The American people deserve to know the source and reason for a substantial policy shift in the type information an agency can communicate. The country must understand the purpose and extent of a perceived effort to censor science.

Sincerely,

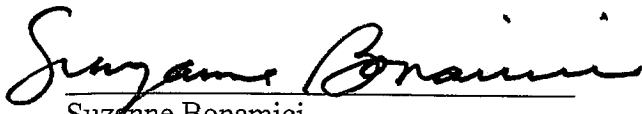



James R. Langevin
Member of Congress



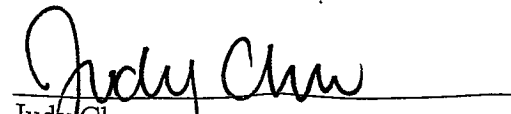
Diana DeGette
Member of Congress


⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/cdc-gets-list-of-forbidden-words-fetus-transgender-diversity/2017/12/15/f503837a-e1cf-11e7-89e8-edec16379010_story.html?utm_term=.d98d98dec06b

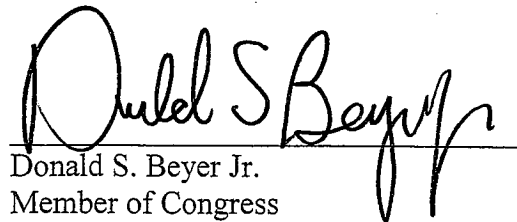

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress




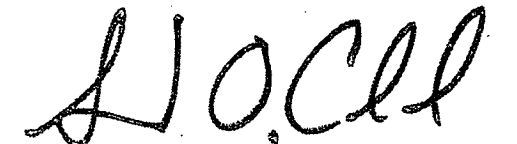
Sean Patrick Maloney
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragan
Member of Congress

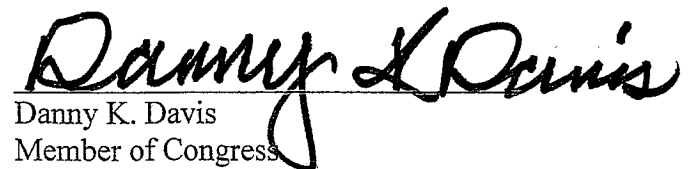

Donald S. Beyer Jr.
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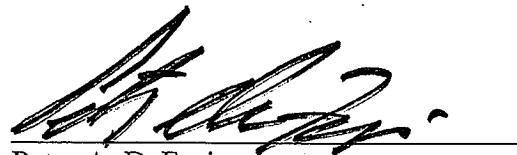

Earl Blumenauer
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Salud O. Carbajal
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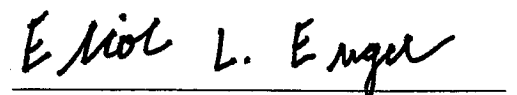

Kathy Castor
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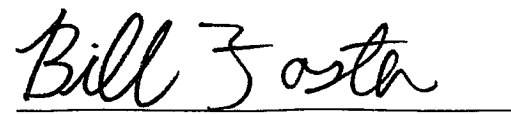

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Mike Doyle

Mike Doyle
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Ruben Gallego

Ruben Gallego
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Jimmy Gomez

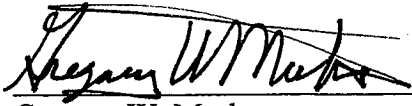
Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress

Colleen Hanabusa

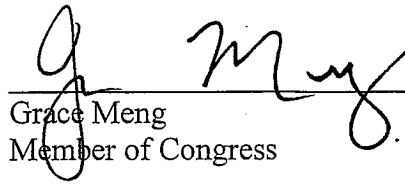
Colleen Hanabusa
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James P. McGovern

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Gregory W. Meeks
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Grace Meng
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Gwen Moore
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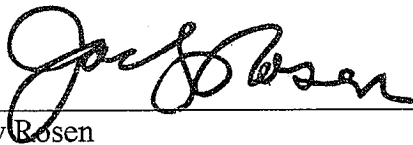
Seth Moulton
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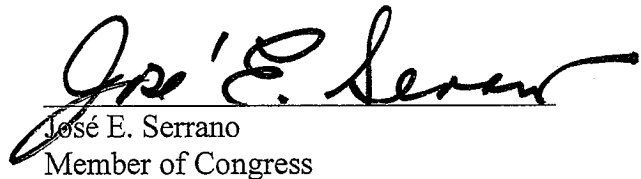
Scott H. Peters
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Chellie Pingree
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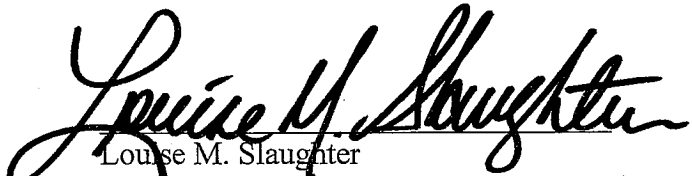
Jacky Rosen
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José E. Serrano
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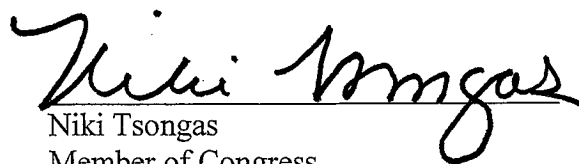
Carol Shea-Porter
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Louise M. Slaughter
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Mark Takano
Member of Congress



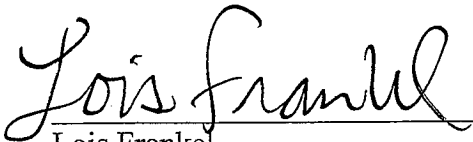
Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress



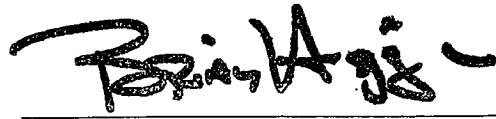
Peter Welch
Member of Congress



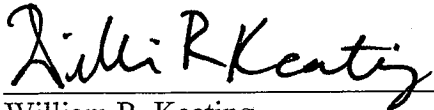
Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



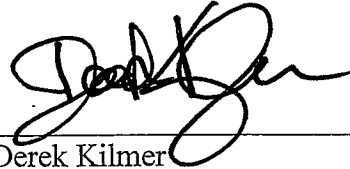
Lois Frankel
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Brian Higgins
Member of Congress



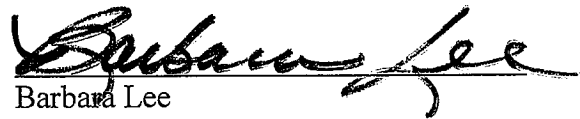
William R. Keating
Member of Congress



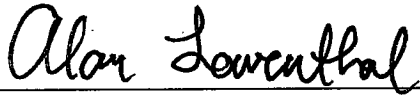
Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress



Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



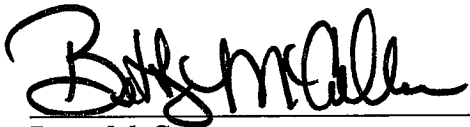
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



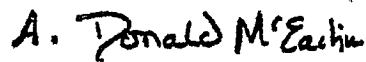
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



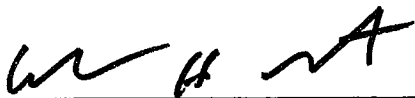
Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress



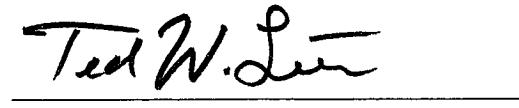
Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Ed Perlmutter
Member of Congress




John A. Yarmuth
Member of Congress



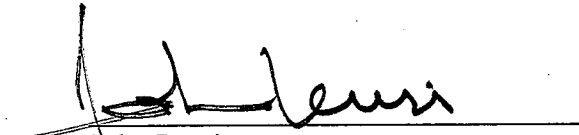
Ted Lieu
Member of Congress



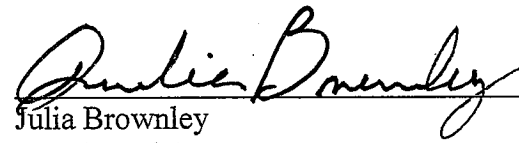
Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



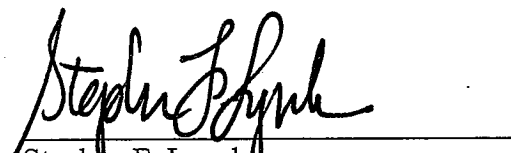
Raul Ruiz
Member of Congress



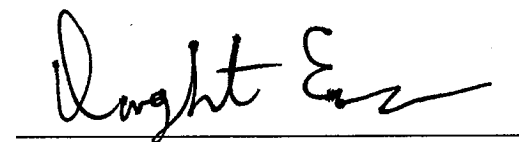
John Lewis
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Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



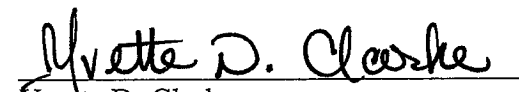
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



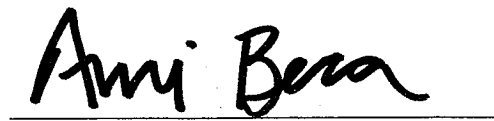
Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



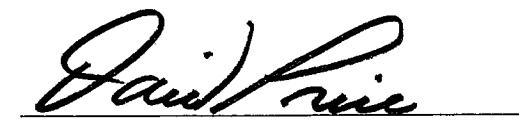
Daniel T. Kildee
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Yvette D. Clarke
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Ami Bera
Member of Congress



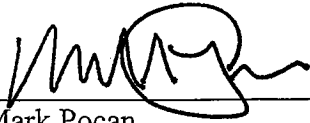
David Price
Member of Congress



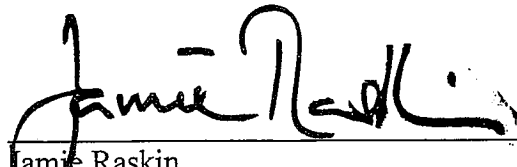
Denny Heck
Member of Congress



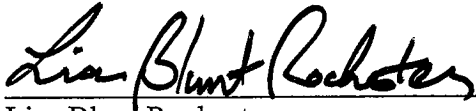
Tulsi Gabbard
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Mark Pocan
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Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



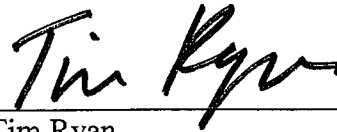
Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress



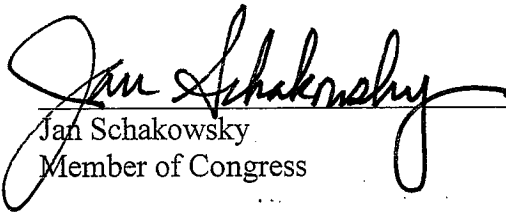
Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress



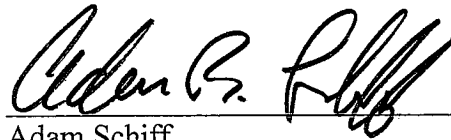
Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress



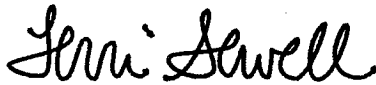
Tim Ryan
Member of Congress



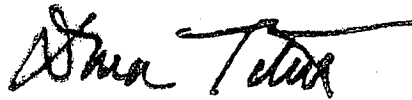
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



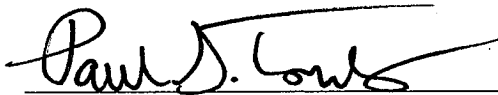
Adam Schiff
Member of Congress



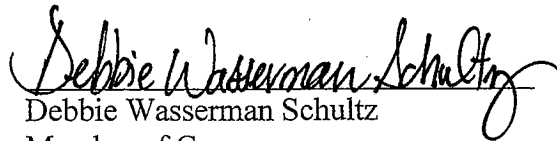
Terri Sewell
Member of Congress



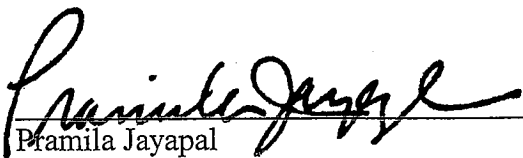
Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Paul D. Tonko
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Debbie Wasserman Schultz
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Pramila Jayapal
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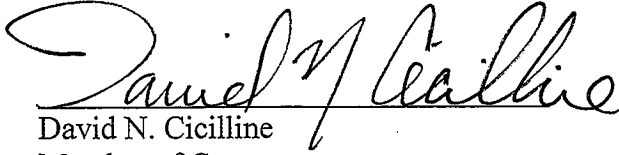


Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
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