

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 21, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We are deeply concerned and outraged about your recent comments and proposed actions related to autism spectrum disorder (ASD). We write today as Members of Congress, but also as parents, family members, and Representatives of loved ones with ASD to demand that you retract your comments and make clear to the nation that individuals with autism play a constructive and valuable role in American society.

Recently, you claimed that people with ASD "will never pay taxes, they'll never hold a job, they'll never play baseball, they'll never write a poem, they'll never go on a date. Many of them will never use a toilet unassisted".¹ This is blatantly false; individuals with autism lead fulfilling, meaningful lives every single day. It is true that families with autistic children may face challenges, but that does not diminish the joy and love individuals with autism bring to their families, schools and communities. Many autistic children have unique talents and skills that inspire their peers. Many adults with autism go to school and work.² As the nation's top health official, your mission is to enhance the health and wellbeing of all Americans, not spread misinformation.

You promulgate the Trump administration's slogan to "Make America Healthy Again," (MAHA) but recent cuts to programs across federal agencies will do the opposite. Mass layoffs at the Department of Education have all but eliminated staff's ability to administer grants through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), stalling research into school-based interventions to improve outcomes for students with autism. The reorganization of HHS, along with cuts to staff and programming, will decimate systems and services that are essential to fulfilling this promise and critical programs. Furthermore, the HHS's Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC) has not received any communication from the HHS under your leadership, nor has it been informed or consulted about these drastic changes in autism funding and research.

Additionally, the Executive Order establishing the Make America Healthy Again Commission states that the increased prevalence of children with ASD and other health conditions "... poses a dire threat to the American people and our way of life."³ To characterize the diagnosis of children's developmental disabilities such as ASD or Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as a "dire threat" falsely labels autistic individuals as a burden and intentionally stokes fear.

In April, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director Dr. Jay Bhattacharya recently announced the launch of a registry of all Americans with ASD. This ASD registry would be created by amassing private medical records from federal and commercial databases – even health data from smartwatches and fitness trackers. After significant alarm from the ASD and medical communities, the NIH has since stated that a new registry will not be created.

However, on May 7th, you announced that HHS would continue to build a "real-world platform" to research autism by weaponizing private health data, medical records, and consumer wearables, this time with a sheen of scientific legitimacy rather than overt monitoring of citizens.⁴ Unfortunately, throughout this period of


confusion and rapid publication of contradictory statements, we have little faith that this research tool will be in the best interest of better understanding ASD.

Instead of vilifying and tracking Americans with ASD, MAHA should help the ASD community by implementing key programs, including: evidence-based research that focuses on improving quality of life, support for caregivers of individuals with ASD, increased access to early childhood screening and interventions, care for adults with ASD and co-occurring psychiatric conditions, and continued access to public health information relating to ASD. It is essential to develop the workforce of the next generation of behavioral pediatricians, psychologists, psychiatrists, speech-language pathologists, special educators, and other related health professions.

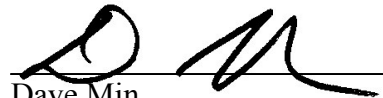
As members of Congress, we also encourage HHS to fully implement the Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education, and Support (CARES) Act of 2024. As you may know, the CARES Act of 2024 authorizes nearly \$2 billion over the next five years to enhance autism research, data collection and healthcare training benefiting individuals with autism. We ask that you consult the senior scientists of IACC, who have been studying ASD for decades, before further upending ASD funding.

Your backing of key health care and educational supports are crucial for the continued ability of individuals with autism and their families to lead fulfilling and healthy lives. As the Secretary of Health and Human Services, it is imperative that you listen to the needs of people with autism and their loved ones by meeting and engaging with the ASD community to become better informed. We demand that you retract your dangerous and harmful comments about autistic individuals and focus on bolstering public health programs to support all Americans.

Sincerely,



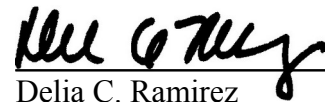
Becca Balint
Member of Congress



Dave Min
Member of Congress



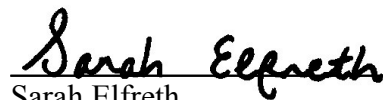
Mike Quigley
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Delia C. Ramirez
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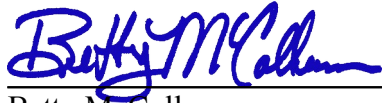
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Jamie Raskin
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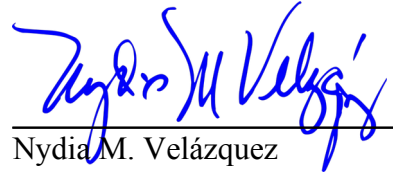
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Bonnie Watson Coleman
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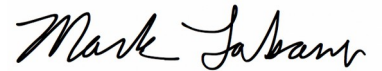
Paul Tonko
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



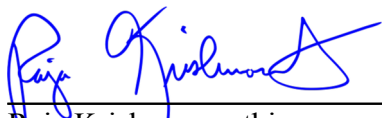
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Member of Congress



MARK TAKANO
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Maggie Goodlander
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Raja Krishnamoorthi
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Eugene Simon Vindman
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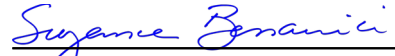
Angie Craig
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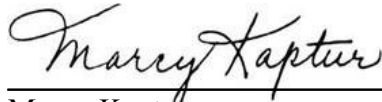
Emanuel Cleaver, II
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