

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510-1304

December 18, 2017

The Honorable Brenda Fitzgerald, M.D.  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Director Fitzgerald:

It has been reported that the Trump Administration is prohibiting officials and staff at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from using a list of seven commonly accepted words and phrases. Banning medical experts and staff from employing the appropriate terminology to carry out the CDC's mission—effectively imposing a gag order on our nation's top public health agency in order to advance a radical right-wing agenda—would be a shocking and worrisome development. I write to seek immediate clarification and a commitment that the agency's critical activities are not being compromised by extreme political ideology.

According to a December 15 *Washington Post* report—which relied on accounts by CDC staff present at the “banned words” conversation—policy analysts at the CDC have been prohibited by senior leadership in the Trump Administration from using a list of seven words or phrases in upcoming budget and supporting materials. The reportedly banned terms include: “vulnerable,” “entitlement,” “diversity,” “transgender,” “fetus,” “evidence-based,” and “science-based.” If true, this is appalling and would jeopardize the CDC's national and global standing in health protection and promotion.

What is even more troubling is that these reports appear to follow a deeply concerning trend from this Administration, whereby other agencies and departments have reportedly been directed to either censor language to fit hyper-partisan agendas or even deny basic, universally accepted science. While different Administrations may have different priorities and opinions, it is unacceptable for different Administrations to impose draconian gag orders on public health scientists, researchers, and experts in order to undermine evidence- or science-based facts.

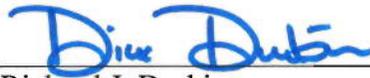
The CDC's national and global leadership is too important to vacate for distorted and repressive political objectives. Therefore, by January 5, 2018, I request answers to the following questions:

- 1) Have CDC officials and staff been banned or discouraged—by anyone in the Trump Administration—from using any words or phrases in the Fiscal Year 2019 budget documents, including: vulnerable, entitlement, diversity, transgender, fetus, evidence-based, and science-based? If so, who imposed this gag order and what was the justification provided, if any?

- 2) Did anyone within the Trump Administration provide written documentation to the CDC, outlining or clarifying the parameters of the gag order? If so, please provide copies of those documents in your response letter.
- 3) As Director of the CDC, do you believe it makes sense for the following words or phrases to be banned from use at the CDC: vulnerable, entitlement, diversity, transgender, fetus, evidence-based, and science-based?

In addition to receiving answers to these questions by January 5, I also request a staff briefing during the month of January, in order to meet the “word police” dictating terms to our nation’s premier public health agency.

Sincerely,



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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Mick Mulvaney, Director, Office of Management and Budget  
The Honorable Eric Hargan, Acting Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services