

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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October 22, 2026

The Honorable Erica Schwartz
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Rd
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Director Schwartz:

On February 6, 2026, we wrote to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) about its unethical and harmful decision to circumvent the agency's formal grantmaking process and direct \$1.6 million of taxpayer funding to a study that would observe the effects of hepatitis B on thousands of unimmunized babies in Guinea-Bissau rather than providing a safe and effective birth dose of the vaccine to prevent this horrible disease.¹ This study was met with such outrage by the international community, including by Members of Congress, that Guinea-Bissau's Foreign Minister announced the study had been terminated, saying "it's not going to happen, period."² Months later, it appears that CDC was still forging ahead by funding a study that dooms children to needless suffering, organ failure, or even death in a country where one in five individuals are infected with hepatitis B, until those efforts were again halted by the government of Guinea-Bissau.³

CDC appears to have allocated funding to this project even as it continues to withhold essential information from Congress and the public about the study's design, award process, ethical review, and financing. Your agency has refused to answer the questions included in our February letter, instead providing a one-page distorted description of the proposed study and a

¹ Letter from Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., Ranking Member, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, to The Honorable Jim O'Neill, Acting Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Feb. 6, 2026).

² *Guinea-Bissau stops vaccine study funded by Trump administration*, Reuters (Feb. 18, 2026).

³ University of Minnesota, *Hepatitis B vaccine study condemned as unethical wins approval from Danish university* (Oct. 8, 2026) (<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/hepatitis/hepatitis-b-vaccine-study-condemned-unethical-wins-approval-danish-university>); Rolling Stone, *CDC Is Moving Forward With a Previously Shelved Controversial Hepatitis B Vaccine Study* (Oct. 7, 2026) (<https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/cdc-controversial-hepatitis-b-vaccine-study-1235637894/>); *Controversial US-backed vaccine trial in African newborns halted*, The Guardian (Oct. 21, 2026).

statement that “[t]he study is currently paused for review.”⁴ The questions from our prior letter, attached for reference along with CDC’s paltry response, remain pending.

Even though Guinea-Bissau has again stated that this study will not happen, our concerns about the broader ethics of CDC’s involvement with this attempted study remain: CDC has yet to provide any meaningful information on whether its revived study meaningfully resolves any of the many ethical defects from the previous proposal, and CDC has yet to explain how this study would provide any scientific benefit. These concerns are amplified by four members of the ethics review committee in Denmark resigning in protest, one of whom stated that “[y]ou are now enrolling newborns in a lottery to test a hypothesis” and that the newborns who “lost the lottery” face unnecessary risks of lifelong harm.⁵ Rather than taking necessary time to deliberate over whether study revisions adequately addressed the many concerns raised with the initial proposal, reporting indicates that the review by the ethics committee was rushed in order to allow CDC funding to be approved by the end of the conclusion of the fiscal year in September.⁶ Further, Guinea-Bissau’s minister of health stated on October 13 that it had not authorized the study and was “surprised” to read reporting to the contrary.⁷ This proposed study harms children, and CDC should not have approved using American taxpayer dollars to fund it.

It is also deeply concerning that CDC has chosen to allocate \$1.6 million from its global health security funding during several disease outbreaks and the Trump Administration’s degradation of CDC’s ability to conduct surveillance of constantly emerging public health threats.⁸ CDC is on track to close over a dozen of its foreign offices in the coming years, closing its offices in Angola and Sudan in September 2026 and preparing to close its Zimbabwe office shortly thereafter.⁹ Meanwhile, global disease outbreaks continue to proliferate. On October 6, 2026, Kenya confirmed its first imported case of this year’s Ebola outbreak, which has resulted in 9,668 reported infections, nearly half of which have been fatal.¹⁰ Amid this, the United States continues to grapple with a historic measles outbreak that has been enabled and exacerbated by years of anti-vaccine ideology, including that promulgated by Secretary of Health and Human

⁴ Letter from Stephen C. Sayle, Deputy Director for Legislative Affairs, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., Ranking Member, House Committee on Energy and Commerce (Apr. 30, 2026).

⁵ *Controversial vaccine trial touted by RFK Jr gets go-ahead in Guinea-Bissau*, The Guardian (Oct. 9, 2026).

⁶ Rolling Stone, *How a Controversial Hepatitis B Study Was Funded by the CDC Amid a Global Swirl of Criticism* (Oct. 14, 2026) (<https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/hepatitis-b-vaccine-study-documents-cdc-1235642201/>).

⁷ *Guinea-Bissau denies it has approved controversial vaccine trial in newborns*, The Guardian (Oct. 14, 2026).

⁸ STAT News, *America’s disease surveillance system is going dark. Here’s what we can build to replace it* (Feb. 13, 2026) (<https://www.statnews.com/2026/02/13/cdc-surveillance-dismantled-rebuild-early-warning-systems/>); see note 6.

⁹ University of Minnesota, *Some CDC foreign offices shutting their doors as US implements ‘America First’ policy* (Oct. 6, 2026) (<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/anti-science/some-cdc-foreign-offices-shutting-their-doors-us-implements-america-first-policy>).

¹⁰ World Health Organization Africa Region, *Ebola Bundibugyo Virus Disease Outbreak Weekly External Situation Report 23* (Oct. 19, 2026) (<https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease-outbreak-news/item/2026-DON619>).

Services (HHS) Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.¹¹ Regardless, CDC has apparently chosen to fund Secretary Kennedy's anti-vaccine pet projects rather than address urgent public health problems here in the United States. While you were not yet CDC Director when this funding was first announced, you are now and cannot evade responsibility for allowing the continued availability of funds for this harmful, unethical, and wasteful study.

While the most recent reporting states that the study has been halted yet again due to a failure to receive approval from the government of Guinea-Bissau, there is no guarantee that you or the Trump Administration will not attempt to again push this study or a similar study forward in the future.¹² Therefore, we renew our February 6, 2026, letter, and request a briefing for Democratic Committee staff on this topic by Thursday, November 5, 2026, which must address any changes to the study's design, the status of CDC disbursements, the findings of any ethical reviews, and the statutory basis for awarding this project. In addition, CDC must preserve all documents and communications related to this study, including all call records, memoranda, emails, and text messages (including exchanges on Signal, WhatsApp, or similar platforms).

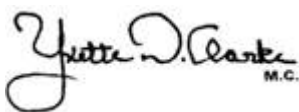
Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member



Diana DeGette
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Health



Yvette Clarke
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Oversight and Investigations

¹¹ *US Measles Cases Reach 35-Year High, For Second Record-Breaking Year in a Row*, CNN (July 24, 2026); University of Minnesota, *Kennedy Defends Measles Record: 'I Have Never Been Anti-Vaccine'* (Apr. 17, 2026) (<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/measles/kennedy-defends-measles-record-i-have-never-been-anti-vaccine>).

¹² *Controversial US-backed vaccine trial in African newborns halted*, The Guardian (Oct. 21, 2026).