

December 22, 2017



The Honorable Eric D. Hargan
Acting Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
330 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20416

Dear Acting Secretary Hargan,

As public health professionals, we are deeply disturbed to learn that HHS officials guided staff not to use words like SCIENCE-BASED, EVIDENCE-BASED, DIVERSITY, FETUS, TRANSGENDER, ENTITLEMENT, and VULNERABLE when preparing for the President's Fiscal Year 2019 budget, according to The Washington Post. This kind of suppression — even the suggestion of it — erodes the rigor of public health and trust in public institutions. It denies the existence of particular people and health conditions. It masks inequities. It hamstring our ability to create the healthier nation that we know the United States can be. Moreover, it uses public funds to do all this, and as people living and working in this country, we are outraged.

As Acting Secretary, you know the mission of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is to enhance and protect the health and well-being of all in the United States. More than 75,000 employees at HHS rely on you to have the necessary resources and tools at their disposal to achieve this critical mission. Those resources include the ability to study the biology of the human body (including its **fetus** stage) using **science-based** methodologies, so that women can live with full health and agency over their own bodies. It includes identifying and disseminating **evidence-based** information so community-based organizations can develop programs to support people in their journey to health and wellness. It does *not* include making invisible whole groups of people who are gender-expansive or **transgender** or deemed **vulnerable**. It does *not* include a fear of **diversity** or misunderstanding **entitlement** to life, health, and the pursuit of happiness.

Words matter. The words we use and hear in our communities, across clinics, governmental public health agencies, and in the research at our own institutions, are the words we expect our publicly funded federal agencies to use too. Anything less limits the core purpose and ability of public health to achieve its mission.

We look forward to your public response, and we stand hopeful for your leadership in halting current and future attempts to pressure health professionals at HHS to expend energy reframing or compromising their work for the sake of political ideology.

Cc: Office of the Secretary Leaders and Dr. Brenda Fitzgerald, Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Sincerely,

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