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California State Senate

SENATOR
DR. RICHARD PAN
SIXTH SENATE DISTRICT



CHAIR
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#3 ON HEALTH
& HUMAN SERVICES

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& RETIREMENT

February 19, 2019

Vice Admiral Jerome M. Adams, MD, MPH
Surgeon General of the United States
1101 Wootton Parkway
Rockville, MD 20851

Dear Surgeon General Adams:

As our nation's doctor, I urge you to issue a call to action on vaccine hesitancy in the United States and make this crisis a public health priority. As physicians, we learned that vaccination is among the top public health achievements in history and that success also depends on vaccination rates sufficient to achieve community immunity. However, due to the deliberate spread of vaccine information discouraging vaccination, particularly through social media, our country is now experiencing outbreaks of preventable diseases. This year, the World Health Organization declared vaccine hesitancy one of the top ten global health threats and the Governor of the State of Washington declared a state of emergency due to a measles outbreak infecting 62 people that is still ongoing.

In the United States, several recent large outbreaks have been linked to active efforts by anti-vaccination groups. The anti-vaccination group, Stop Mandatory Vaccination targeted women ages 20 to 60 living in the State of Washington on Facebook with paid anti-vaccination ads receiving millions of views. In New York, the anti-vaccination group, Parents Teaching and Advocating for Child Safety targeted the Orthodox Jewish community with a hotline and magazines which helped spread a measles outbreak that has infected over 200 people to date. In Minnesota, MMR vaccination rates among Somali fell to 42 percent after anti-vaxxers, including Andrew Wakefield, who authored a fraudulent retracted paper on MMR and autism and lost his medical license, targeted their community. The resulting 2017 measles outbreak infected 79 people, of which 22 were hospitalized, exposed over 8000 people and cost taxpayers over \$1 million for public health departments to contain the disease. Even as measles spread in Minnesota, anti-vaccination groups actively undermined physicians and public health officials combating the disease.

As we just celebrated President's Day, I would recall George Washington mandated smallpox inoculation of his army during the Revolutionary War to ensure our country's freedom. I call on you to protect our right as Americans to be free of preventable diseases in our own communities.

I wish to recognize your public advocacy for vaccination on social media and in other venues, and I appreciate CDC Director Robert Redfield and FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb doing the same. However, your fellow physicians are frequently harassed by anti-vaccine extremists

on social media to silence us, and we also face personal threats and attacks on our reputation including false reviews on Yelp and Google. In addition, social media platforms are directing parents to anti-vaccination websites, videos and closed Facebook groups, where people posting comments supporting vaccination are banned.

While a large majority of Americans support vaccination and vaccinate their own children, communities are at risk with vaccine refusal. I witnessed this first hand as a U.S. Public Health Service COSTEP officer in Philadelphia in 1991 when a measles outbreak infected over 900 people and nine children died.

As a pediatrician, I counsel my patients about the importance of vaccination and the diseases they prevent, and as a State Senator, I have authored and passed state legislation to restore community immunity. However, contagious diseases do not recognize state borders or even national ones. Our nation requires your leadership to stop this attack on our nation's health by addressing the spread of vaccine misinformation causing unwarranted vaccine hesitancy and recommending policies that restore community immunity which protects our children and the most vulnerable among us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Pan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Richard Pan, MD, MPH, FAAP
State Senator