



Robert F Kennedy Jr

Support letter for RFK Jr's confirmation includes signatures of doctors with suspended or revoked licenses

Meant to lend credibility to his nomination to head HHS, the letter is signed by some doctors disciplined for not following Covid guidelines

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A letter submitted to the US Senate that states it was sent by physicians in support of Robert F Kennedy Jr's nomination as secretary of health and human services includes the names of doctors who have had their licenses revoked or suspended, or who have faced other disciplinary actions, the Associated Press has found.

The letter was meant to lend credibility to Kennedy's nomination, which has faced strenuous opposition from medical experts due to his two decades of anti-vaccine activism. Republican senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, a medical doctor who boasts on his official website of an effort he created to vaccinate 36,000 children against hepatitis B, expressed hesitancy about Kennedy's nomination and is seen as a key vote.

The AP found that in addition to the physicians who had faced disciplinary action, many of the nearly 800 signers are not doctors. The letter with the names of those who signed was provided to the AP by Senator Ron Johnson's office after he entered it into the congressional record on Wednesday during the first of Kennedy's two confirmation hearings.

Among those who signed it were a self-described journalist, a certified public accountant, a firefighter/paramedic, a certified health coach and someone who said they had a bachelor's degree "with an emphasis on Jungian psychology". The signers include at least 75 nurses, as well as physician's assistants. More than 90 did not include any credentials at all.

More than 20 were chiropractors, representing an industry that has funded Kennedy's work. An AP investigation found that donations from a chiropractic group represented one-sixth of the revenues collected by Kennedy's anti-vaccine non-profit in 2019.

The letter was organized and submitted by Maha Action, which is run by Del Bigtree, who worked for Kennedy's presidential campaign and is a longtime anti-vaccine activist. The Washington Post reported on Wednesday that Kennedy transferred the trademark for the "Maha" slogan to a limited liability company run by Bigtree. Kennedy reported that he had received \$100,000 in income from licensing the slogan but said in his financial disclosures that he had transferred the trademark for "no compensation".

Maha stands for "Make America healthy again", a play on Donald Trump's "Make America great again".

Emma Post, a Maha Action spokesperson, said in an email that the letter had been "shared and circulated organically in a grassroots manner with explicit instructions that it was for physicians only to sign on to". She did not address the AP's questions

about what further steps the group took to verify credentials, if any.

Bigtree and Kennedy did not return messages seeking comment. A White House spokesperson, Kush Desai, said the administration looks forward to the Senate's swift confirmation of Kennedy.

The letter includes the header "Doctors for Robert F Kennedy Jr" and begins with the words "We, the undersigned physicians". It says lower down that it "reflects the collective voice of physicians and medical professionals" committed to addressing chronic disease.

The AP's review found that at least 10 doctors who signed the letter had run into trouble with state medical boards or their board-certification bodies for a variety of alleged misconduct. Sanctions they faced included having their licenses revoked or suspended, being put on probation, receiving a reprimand or other action. One received a warning letter from the Federal Trade Commission, which said he was unlawfully advertising products as treatments or prevention for Covid-19, including intravenous nutrient therapy and vitamins.

Among the signers was Paul Thomas, an anti-vaccine doctor who voluntarily surrendered his medical license in 2022 after Oregon's medical board found he had engaged in repeated and gross negligence in the practice of medicine.

Thomas did not admit or deny the finding. NBC News reported that Thomas had been part of a team assembled by Kennedy who remotely advised an anti-vaccine activist in Samoa during a measles outbreak there on how to treat children with vitamins. A person who responded on behalf of Thomas, DeeDee Hoover, said the information the AP had was inaccurate but did not reply when asked what specifically was wrong.

Other signers included Dr Simone Gold, who was reprimanded by California's medical board after she pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor for her conduct at the US Capitol on 6 January 2021. Gold was recently pardoned by Trump and told the AP in an email that her reprimand and other disciplinary actions had been overturned by a judge prior to her pardon.

"Robert F Kennedy Jr is an honorable and honest person with vast subject matter knowledge and experience who values the health of the American people, and furthermore because he is willing to challenge corporate interests where they conflict with the best interests of those citizens," Gold wrote in an email.

Meryl Nass, whose medical license was suspended in Maine over her treatment of Covid-19 patients, also signed. She told the AP she is appealing the decision and expects to be fully vindicated.

At least two of the doctors were disciplined, prior to the pandemic, for improperly giving out vaccine waivers, including one who had his license revoked and another who was put on probation. Another doctor's license was revoked for refusing to follow Covid-19 guidelines.

Post said Maha Action's letter was just one of several provided to the Senate supporting Kennedy, including one that she provided a link to that she said was signed by "17,000 medical professionals". That letter stated it was from international medical providers and did not include the names of those who had signed.

Opponents of Kennedy's nomination sent their own letter with signatures from what they said were more than 18,000 "vetted and verified" doctors. The group, the Committee to Protect Health Care, said that the letter had initially been circulated among verified physicians and that as additional signatures were added, their credentials were checked. The group provided the list of signatories to the AP but with anonymized names that included the first initial of their first name along with the first three letters of their last name, as well as their medical credentials. They said doctors' names were anonymized for their privacy and to protect them from harassment.

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