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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

September 12, 2025

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

In my state of Louisiana, we are experiencing the worst pertussis outbreak in 35 years. The outbreak has already killed two babies, with 368 total cases reported, according to provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).¹ Most hospitalizations have been babies under the age of one.² Louisiana is not alone—others, including rural and frontier states, are in the midst of responding to their own pertussis outbreaks. We cannot lose more lives or allow these outbreaks to continue growing across the United States.

The United States faced a noteworthy infectious disease outbreak in West Texas earlier this year, when two children died from measles and many more were hospitalized with the disease. As the lead health official in the nation, you encouraged families to get the MMR vaccine to protect their children. You rightly said, “[v]accines not only protect individual children from measles, but also contribute to community immunity, protecting those who are unable to be vaccinated due to medical reasons.” I thank you for encouraging children to get vaccinated and leading HHS’s efforts to address this outbreak. As you acknowledged, “measles is a highly contagious respiratory illness with certain health risks, especially to unvaccinated individuals.”³ The same is true for pertussis. Among those hospitalized in Louisiana, 75 percent were either unvaccinated or not up to date on pertussis vaccinations.

President Trump recently declared unequivocally “you have vaccines that work. They just pure and simple work. They’re not controversial at all. And I think those vaccines should be used

¹ “Pertussis: (Week 34) Weekly Cases* of Notifiable Diseases, United States, U.S. Territories, and Non-U.S. Residents Week Ending August 23, 2025.” Cdc.gov, vol. 2025, 23 Aug. 2025, stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/231649. Accessed 11 Sept. 2025.

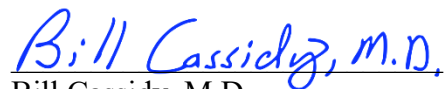
² Rosemary Westwood, WWNO “Louisiana’s Deadly Whooping Cough Outbreak Is Now Its Worst in 35 Years.” WWNO, 3 Sept. 2025, www.wwno.org/public-health/2025-09-03/louisianas-deadly-whooping-cough-outbreak-is-now-its-worst-in-35-years. Accessed 11 Sept. 2025.

³ Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Measles outbreak is a call to action for all of us, *Fox News* (Mar. 2, 2025), <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/robert-f-kennedy-jr-measles-outbreak-call-action-all-us>.

otherwise some people are going to catch it and they endanger other people. And when you don't have controversy at all, I think people should take it."⁴ The DTaP vaccine protects babies against dying from pertussis, and, like the MMR vaccine, is safe and effective.

I want to work together to stop pertussis. Your strong public support for this vaccine will save lives. Your words are a powerful tool in protecting the health of the American people. Families responded to your decisive leadership when you clearly promoted the MMR vaccine to stop the outbreak in West Texas. They would respond again to your call that the DTaP vaccine is the best way to protect our babies. We can ensure that no child dies from a vaccine-preventable disease. I ask that you publicly reaffirm your support for the DTaP vaccine, so that Louisiana families, and families across the United States, confidently know that taking the vaccine is safe and may save their child's life.

Sincerely,



Bill Cassidy, M.D.

Chairman

Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions

⁴ Sheryl Gay Stolberg, Maggie Haberman, Vaccines and C.D.C. Chaos Expose Tensions Between Trump and Kennedy, *NY Times* (Sept. 10, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/10/us/politics/trump-rfk-vaccines-cdc.html#:~:text=Questioning%20a%20move%20by%20Florida,Trump%20Administration:%20Live%20Updates>