

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 24, 2022

The Honorable Rochelle P. Walensky, M.D.  
Director  
U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30329

Director Walensky:

I write concerning recent reporting that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) contracted with the same public relations firm that represents Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna.<sup>1</sup> This revelation raises serious questions about potential conflicts of interest related to CDC's COVID-19 vaccine recommendations.

On September 28, 2020, CDC awarded a federal contract award to Weber Shandwick<sup>2</sup> to conduct marketing consulting services for the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD).<sup>3</sup> NCIRD is responsible for providing management and support services to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), which issues recommendations to CDC on vaccines including the COVID-19 vaccine.<sup>4</sup>

According to reports, Weber's work on behalf of NCIRD includes promoting vaccines and communicating the risks and recommended actions for outbreaks. Weber is responsible for providing NCIRD with "10 on-site health communications staffers, seven health comms specialists, two health research specialists and one social media specialist."<sup>5</sup> Weber's strategic communications will include "generating story ideas, distributing articles and conducting outreach to news, media and entertainment organizations."<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Weber is expected to

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<sup>1</sup> Luke Andrews, Revealed: PR firm that represents Pfizer and Moderna also sits on CDC vaccine division – sparking major conflict of interest concerns, Daily Mail (Oct. 12, 2020), <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-11303017/PR-firm-represents-Pfizer-Moderna-sits-CDC-vaccine-advisory-committee.html>; Paul Thacker, Weber Shandwick Provides PR for Moderna and Pfizer, While Staffing the CDC's Vaccine Office, The DisInformation Chronicle (Oct. 11, 2020), <https://disinformationchronicle.substack.com/p/weber-shandwick-provides-pr-for-moderna>.

<sup>2</sup> Also referred to as CMGRP, INC. and IPG DXTRA, INC.

<sup>3</sup> USASpending, [https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT\\_AWD\\_75D30120F08104\\_7523\\_HHSD2002015M88164B\\_7523](https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT_AWD_75D30120F08104_7523_HHSD2002015M88164B_7523) (last visited Oct. 21, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Charter of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (March 28, 2022), *available at* <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/acip/committee/acip-charter.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Moore, Weber Shandwick wins potential \$50m CDC flu vaccine comms account, MM+M (Oct. 26, 2020), <https://www.mmm-online.com/home/channel/campaigns/weber-shandwick-wins-potential-50m-cdc-flu-vaccine-comms-account/>.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

“conduct target audience research” and “develop and implement a comms plan targeting healthcare providers.”<sup>7</sup>

According to USASpending.gov, Weber’s contract with CDC is worth up to \$55.2 million and is being paid in part using COVID-19 emergency funds.<sup>8</sup> Since the initial award, CDC extended Weber’s contract twice, including as recently as August 2022.<sup>9</sup>

Weber embedded staff within CDC to promote vaccines and provide communications services related to COVID-19 while simultaneously representing the interests of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, two pharmaceutical companies actively seeking federal approval of their respective COVID-19 vaccines.<sup>10</sup> On December 12, 2020, ACIP recommended the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in persons aged 16 years and older.<sup>11</sup> On December 19, 2020, ACIP recommended the use of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine in persons aged 18 and older.<sup>12</sup> ACIP has since recommended the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines for use in the majority of the population, including children as young as six months.<sup>13</sup> ACIP has also recommended Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna’s COVID-19 boosters.<sup>14</sup>

Weber’s simultaneous work for the NCRID, Pfizer-BioNTech, and Moderna raises serious concerns about the independence of CDC and ACIP’s vaccine recommendations. Americans expect and deserve impartiality from the entities responsible for issuing recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccines and boosters.

For this reason, I respectfully request additional information regarding the nature of Weber’s work for the NCIRD. Please provide the following information no later than 5:00PM on November 7, 2022:

1. Unredacted copies of CDC’s contract award with Weber Shandwick<sup>15</sup> (PIID 75D30120F08104) and all associated documentation, including but not limited to, records relating to the exercise of options.
2. Unredacted copies of all offers received for Solicitation ID 75D301-20-Q-71331, including all corresponding documentation.

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<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> USASpending, [https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT\\_AWD\\_75D30120F08104\\_7523\\_HHSD2002015M88164B\\_7523](https://www.usaspending.gov/award/CONT_AWD_75D30120F08104_7523_HHSD2002015M88164B_7523) (last visited Oct. 21, 2022).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> Paul Thacker, Weber Shandwick Provides PR for Moderna and Pfizer, While Staffing the CDC’s Vaccine Office, *The DisInformation Chronicle* (Oct. 11, 2020), <https://disinformationchronicle.substack.com/p/weber-shandwick-provides-pr-for-moderna>.

<sup>11</sup> The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices’ Interim Recommendation for Use of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine, *available at* <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6950e2.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices’ Interim Recommendation for Use of Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine, *available at* <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm695152e1.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Interim Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices for Use of Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccines in Children Aged 6 Months-5 Years, *available at* <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7126e2.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> COVID-19 ACIP Vaccine Recommendations, *available at* <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/acip-recs/vacc-specific/covid-19.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Also referred to as CMGRP, INC. and IPG DXTRA, INC.

3. Unredacted copies of records relating to any conflict of interest evaluation of Weber Shandwick<sup>16</sup> as it relates to (PIID 75D30120F08104), including but not limited to, communications with Weber Shandwick<sup>17</sup> or its representatives.
4. The names of all individuals performing work for NCRID under the Weber Shandwick<sup>18</sup> contract award (PIID 75D30120F08104) and their place of performance;
5. Unredacted copies of any records relating to work performed under the Weber Shandwick contract award (PIID 75D30120F08104) for ACIP, including communications, talking points, memorandum, and background material.

For any documents that are responsive to this request but not produced, please include a justification and citation of the legal authority that authorizes the withholding of the document from Congress.

The American people have a right to a transparent and open government. I appreciate your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rand Paul". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Rand" and "Paul" being capitalized and prominent.

Rand Paul, M.D.  
U.S. Senator

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<sup>16</sup> Also referred to as CMGRP, INC. and IPG DXTRA, INC.

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