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October 20, 2015

The Honorable Sylvia Matthews Burwell
Secretary of Health & Human Services
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Madam Secretary:

We at the Secular Policy Institute, together with the below signed organizations, would like to request that you petition the President of the United States to promote legislation on national vaccination policy. We believe it is crucial to public health and safety to usher a unanimous vaccine policy nationwide, and repeal state-allowed, non-medical exemptions to vaccination.

The Center for Disease Control makes national vaccine policy recommendations for children and adults. It then rests on states legislatures to approve those recommendations, and on state health departments to enforce the approved mandates. As it currently stands, all 50 states allow medical exemptions to vaccines which could be detrimental to the health of an individual. But more of concern are the 48 states that allow philosophical and religious exemptions as well. Whereas allowing an exemption on medical grounds requires precise protocols and certifications by medical professionals, a personal exemption may subjectively be granted to persons “who hold a sincere religious or spiritual beliefs”, and who may perceive forced vaccination as infringement on their right to exercise their beliefs.

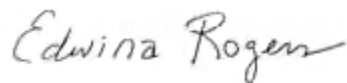
The benefits of vaccinations are vast: from increasing “herd immunity” and easily preventing deaths, to protecting future generations, to providing economic benefits to society (CDC estimates \$1.38 trillion saving in “societal costs” in the last two decades; CDC, "Possible Side-Effects from Vaccines" Feb. 4, 2014). All of these pros have been proven above doubt. Yet, we allow ourselves an avenue to subvert the beneficial achievements of science, and thus create circumstance for tragedies to arise. The 2014 outbreak of measles in California is just the most recent example of how destructive a pandemic can be. In only slightly more distant past there are other examples, such as the 1991 Philadelphia measles outbreak which resulted in the deaths of 9 schoolchildren. These incidents could have been avoided had there been more adherence to facts, instead of adherence to religious convictions.

There has been a lot of fear mongering and misinformation fed to the public on what vaccines actually achieve. An unfortunate publication of a fraudulent paper by Andrew Wakefield (Lancet, 1998, since retracted) on the MMR vaccine caused significant long-term damage to

public trust in science. The misinformation campaign on MMR vaccine brought on a decline in children vaccination rates from 92% to 80% (United Kingdom). The government has an obligation to protect and educate the citizens, and to make a determination of which individual choices must no longer remain an individual's – if broader public interest is at stake. When the First Amendment right to freely hold and exercise beliefs is called upon, states must present a “compelling State interest” to take this right away. Preventing and/or limiting the spread of preventable communicable diseases have already been defined as such compelling State interests by the US Supreme Court (*Jacobson v. Massachusetts*, 1905). When a parent protests against restricting their freedom of choice, we must weigh parents' right to decide versus a child's right to health. Undoubtedly all parents would choose to vaccinate if accurate scientific explanations were provided to them.

We therefore ask that you work with the President, Governors, and state legislatures to introduce mandatory schedules of vaccinations, and to revoke worldview-based exemptions. It is government's duty to help citizens of the United States protect themselves and those around them. And it is high time for laws to catch up with scientific evidence.

Sincerely,



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Signatories

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Atlanta Freethought Society – Atlanta, Georgia, USA
Contra Costa Atheists and Freethinkers (CCAF) – Pleasant Hill, California, USA
Detroit Coalition of Reason – Detroit, Michigan, USA
Hispanic American Freethinkers, Inc. – Reston, Virginia, USA
Humanist Association of San Diego – San Diego, California, USA
Humanist Chaplaincy at American University – Washington, DC, USA
Humanist Society of Redding – Redding, California, USA
Humanists of Sarasota Bay – Sarasota Bay, Florida, USA
Muslimish – Plymouth, Michigan, USA
Red River Freethinkers – Fargo, North Dakota, USA
Rossmoor Atheists and Agnostics – Walnut Creek, California, USA
San Diego Coalition of Reason – San Diego, California, USA
United Coalition of Reason – Washington, DC, USA
Watford Area Humanists – Watford, Hertfordshire, UK