

Testimony from Dr. Susan Coller Monarez

Senate HELP Committee Hearing

“Restoring Trust Through Radical Transparency: Reviewing Recent Events at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Implications for Children’s Health”

September 17, 2025

Chairman Cassidy, Ranking Member Sanders, distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you again. My name is Susan Monarez, and I am a microbiologist and immunologist.

Exactly 12 weeks ago, in this same room, I testified that if confirmed, I would lead the CDC to restore public trust, modernize public health infrastructure, and strengthen the agency's core mission of protecting Americans from infectious diseases and emerging threats.

I was honored to be nominated by President Trump and confirmed with the Senate's support. Secretary Kennedy himself swore me in on July 31, calling me "a public health expert with unimpeachable scientific credentials."

My tenure as CDC Director lasted 29 days. Since my removal, several explanations have been offered: that I told the Secretary I would resign, that I was not aligned with administration priorities, or that I was untrustworthy. None of those reflect what actually happened. I will share the details, but I want to be clear: today should not be about me. Today should be about the future of trust in public health.

The events leading to my dismissal began weeks before August 25.

On August 2, I learned from media reports that experts serving as liaison representatives to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) — including those from major medical societies — had been removed from its working groups. The following week, I heard concerns that ACIP might alter the childhood vaccine schedule at its September meeting, potentially without credible supporting data. On August 8, a gunman, driven by vaccine distrust, fired 180 rounds into CDC headquarters in Atlanta, killing Officer David Rose. In the days after the attack, I focused on security, staff, and ensuring the CDC could continue its mission.

On August 19, I received a directive from the Secretary's office that I now required prior approval from my political staff for CDC policy and personnel decisions. On August 21, I was told to return to Washington from Atlanta immediately, which would have meant missing Officer Rose's memorial — something I was not willing to do. When I did return, I was concerned about my ability to continue leading the CDC while preserving evidence-based decision-making — commitments I had made to this Committee during my confirmation hearing.

On the morning of August 25, Secretary Kennedy demanded two things of me that were inconsistent with my oath of office and the ethics required of a public official. He directed me to commit in advance to approving every ACIP recommendation regardless of the scientific evidence. He also directed me to dismiss career officials responsible for vaccine policy, without cause. He said if I was unwilling to do both, I should resign. I responded that I could not pre-approve recommendations without reviewing the evidence, and I had no basis to fire scientific experts. He told me he had already spoken with the White House several times about having me removed.

For three decades, I have worked at the intersection of public health, science, and technology innovation — always challenging the status quo and welcoming the change that comes from research and discovery. Even under pressure, I could not replace evidence with ideology or compromise my integrity. Vaccine policy must be guided by credible data, not predetermined outcomes.

As I wrote in my September 4 *Wall Street Journal* Op-Ed, I agree with President Trump: we should not hesitate to ask for proof about our vaccines, and I also agree with his most recent comments that vaccines are not controversial because they work. Demanding evidence is exactly what I was doing when I insisted CDC recommendations be based on credible science.

I was never misaligned with administration priorities. The goals Secretary Kennedy recently cited publicly — protecting the public from threats, building infrastructure, modernizing systems, investing in the workforce, and enhancing scientific rigor — were the same priorities I articulated at my confirmation hearing and began advancing during my short tenure. I remain supportive of those priorities. The question is whether they can be achieved without the expertise required at the CDC.

Regarding trustworthiness — I cannot define that word for Secretary Kennedy. I made commitments to this Committee that I would lead with integrity, transparency, and purpose, and work with Congress to maximize health outcomes and protect the American people. Secretary Kennedy told me he could not trust me. I had refused to commit to approving vaccine recommendations without evidence, fire career officials without cause, or resign — and I had shared my concerns with this Committee. I told the Secretary that if he believed he could not trust me, he could fire me.

The next day, I was told I still had my job, but the Secretary's expectations remained: approval of ACIP recommendations and dismissal of career scientists. I would not commit to that, and I believe it is the true reason I was fired.

Tomorrow, the reconstituted ACIP will meet. Its composition has already raised concerns from the medical community. Based on what I observed during my tenure, there is real risk that recommendations could be made restricting access to vaccines for children and others in need without rigorous scientific review. With no permanent CDC Director in place, those recommendations could be adopted.

The stakes are not theoretical. We have already seen the largest measles outbreak in more than 30 years, which claimed the lives of two children. If vaccine protections are weakened, preventable diseases will return.

I was fired for holding the line on scientific integrity. But that line does not disappear with me. It now runs through every parent deciding whether to vaccinate a child, every physician counseling a patient, and every American who demands accountability.

I want to end where I began with my confirmation hearing. I spoke then about the value of hard work, paying my own way through college, and my lifelong dedication to science and public

health. On August 25, I could have stayed silent, agreed to demands, and no one would have known. What the public would have seen were scientists dismissed without cause and vaccine protections quietly eroded — all under the authority of a Senate-confirmed Director with “unimpeachable credentials.”

I could have kept the office and the title. But I would have lost the one thing that cannot be replaced: my integrity.

Some may question my motives or mischaracterize my words. That is part of public life. But I am not here as a politician. I am here as a scientist, a public servant, and a parent committed to protecting the health of future generations.

The question before us is whether we will keep faith with our children and grandchildren — ensuring they remain safe from the diseases we fought so hard to defeat: polio, measles, diphtheria, whooping cough, and many others. Undoing that progress would not only be reckless — it would betray every family that trusts us to protect their health.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.