

October 12, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

Recent media reports indicate that Dr. Michelle McMurry-Heath, President and CEO of the Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO), is near the top of your list of candidates to be the next U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner.

We, the undersigned consumer advocacy, patient advocacy, science, public health, social justice and human rights, academic research, sustainable agriculture advocacy, and environmental advocacy organizations, are writing to voice our strong opposition to Dr. McMurry-Heath as a candidate for FDA Commissioner and to urge you to select for this critical federal public health position someone with demonstrated independence from Big Pharma.

Serving as head of a Big Pharma trade association is per se disqualifying for the position of FDA commissioner. As leader of the world's largest biotechnology advocacy association since June 2020, Dr. McMurry-Heath has represented the interests of several hundred pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies regulated by the FDA. BIO has opposed your administration's efforts to lower drug prices and endorsed other policies contrary to the public interest. Prior to joining BIO, Dr. McMurry-Heath held numerous senior leadership positions at Johnson & Johnson, one of numerous drug companies that helped fuel America's ongoing opioid crisis.

The crucial position of FDA Commissioner demands a person without Big Pharma conflicts of interests. Individuals who currently or have recently worked as pharmaceutical industry executives, served on drug corporation boards of directors, held positions at organizations that greatly relied on industry funding, or lobbied for or otherwise meaningfully represented the industry cannot provide that essential independence. The country desperately needs an FDA Commissioner who will reverse the decades-long trend in which the agency's relationship with the pharmaceutical and medical-device industries has grown ever cozier — resulting in regulatory capture of the agency by industry.

The next FDA Commissioner must be someone who has been dedicated to advancing public health and unquestionably will place the public interest ahead of the interests of FDA-regulated industries. Dr. McMurry-Heath is not that person.

Thank you for your consideration of our views on this important matter.

Sincerely,

American Medical Student Association
Care for Crash Victims
Center for Genetics and Society
Debs-Jones-Douglass Institute
Doctors for America
Food & Water Watch
Friends of the Earth
Georgians for a Healthy Future
Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy
Jacobs Institute of Women's Health
National Center for Health Research
Network for Environmental & Economic Responsibility/UCC
Organic Consumers Association
PharmedOut
Physicians for a National Health Program
Physicians for Responsible Opioid Prescribing
Prescription Justice
Progressive Change Institute
Protect All Children's Environment
Public Citizen
R2H Action [Right to Health]
Revolving Door Project
Social Security Works
T1International
Universities Allied for Essential Medicines (UAEM)
Woodymatters