

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives

SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

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November 12, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Secretary Becerra and Director Walensky:

The Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis is investigating the federal government's response to the coronavirus pandemic in order to better understand what went wrong, identify ways to improve the country's response, and determine what corrective steps are necessary to ensure our nation is better prepared for any future public health crisis. Our investigations have found that the Trump Administration engaged in a persistent pattern of political interference in the pandemic response and took actions that allowed the virus to spread in an attempt to advance former President Trump's electoral prospects. As senior officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with responsibility for overseeing critical aspects of the nation's pandemic response, Martin Cetron, Daniel Jernigan, and Henry Walke possess relevant information regarding key events under investigation. I write to request that these individuals appear for transcribed interviews regarding these matters.

The Trump Administration's use of the pandemic to advance political goals manifested itself most acutely in its efforts to manipulate and undermine CDC's scientific work.<sup>1</sup> Through

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Letter from Chairman James E. Clyburn, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, to Secretary Xavier Becerra, Department of Health and Human Services, and Director Rochelle P. Walensky, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (July 26, 2021) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/2021-07-26.Select%20Sub%20to%20Becerra%20and%20Walensky%20re%20Interview%20Requests.pdf>); Letter from Chairman James E. Clyburn, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, to Chief of Staff Ronald A. Klain, The White House (Feb. 8, 2021) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/2021-02-08.Clyburn%20to%20Klain%20re%20WH%20Failures%20on%20Pandemic%20.pdf>); Letter from Chairman James E. Clyburn, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, to Secretary Alex M. Azar II, Department of Health and Human Services, and Director Robert R. Redfield, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Dec. 21, 2020) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/2020-12->

its investigations, the Select Subcommittee has uncovered a staggering pattern of political interference from Trump Administration officials in critical aspects of CDC's pandemic response efforts. For example, the Select Subcommittee has obtained evidence detailing attempts by Trump White House officials and political appointees to block CDC scientists from speaking to the public for the first three months of the pandemic; to alter or block at least 12 public health guidelines drafted by CDC scientists from being released to the public; to pressure CDC scientists to adopt the Trump Administration's policy positions and talking points even when they conflicted with science; and to make changes to at least 13 Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports (MMWR) related to the pandemic. These incidents degraded every major facet of the nation's public health response and materially damaged the standing of the premier public health agency in the eyes of the world.<sup>2</sup>

As senior leaders at CDC, Dr. Cetron, Dr. Jernigan, and Dr. Walke had responsibility over key aspects of the pandemic response. Among other responsibilities, Dr. Jernigan and Dr. Walke each served in the role of Incident Manager for CDC's COVID-19 Response for portions of 2020, while Dr. Cetron served as the Director of CDC's Division of Global Migration and Quarantine and was intimately involved in key decisions related to the pandemic. Evidence obtained by the Select Subcommittee confirms that these individuals likely possess firsthand knowledge of the ways in which CDC was undermined during this critical time. For these reasons, it is imperative that the Select Subcommittee hear from these officials to understand their perspective on how the Trump Administration's decisions affected the nation's response to the pandemic.

### **The Trump Administration's Efforts to Interfere with CDC's Scientific Work**

The Select Subcommittee has gathered extensive evidence regarding the Trump Administration's efforts to interfere with the work of CDC scientists. Evidence recently obtained by the Select Subcommittee details attempts by Trump White House officials and political appointees to block CDC scientists from speaking to the public during the crucial early months of the pandemic. Previous reporting indicated that former President Trump was angered by remarks delivered by Dr. Nancy Messonnier, former CDC Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, at a briefing on February 25, 2020, which Dr. Messonnier confirmed during an interview with the Select Subcommittee.<sup>3</sup> Less than two weeks after Dr. Messonnier's comments, CDC stopped holding public briefings entirely for more than three months—a period that coincided with the rapid explosion in coronavirus cases across

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21.Clyburn%20to%20Redfield%20and%20Azar%20re%20Subpoena%20FINAL%20\_0.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, *The Trump Administration's Pattern of Political Interference in the Nation's Coronavirus Response* (July 26, 2021) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/7.26.2021%20Timeline%20of%20Political%20Interference%20-%20final.pdf>).

<sup>3</sup> *A New Documentary Shows How a Top CDC Official Who Warned Americans About the Coronavirus Promptly Vanished from Public View*, Insider (Oct. 20, 2020) (online at [www.businessinsider.com/cdc-official-warned-us-coronavirus-was-silenced-documentary-2020-10](http://www.businessinsider.com/cdc-official-warned-us-coronavirus-was-silenced-documentary-2020-10)); Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Transcribed Interview of Dr. Nancy Messonnier (Oct. 8, 2021).

the country and that partly overlapped with Dr. Jernigan’s service as Incident Manager.<sup>4</sup> Multiple officials from CDC confirmed to the Select Subcommittee during recent interviews that White House officials blocked CDC requests to conduct public briefings during this time, including CDC’s request to hold a briefing in early April 2020 that would have shared information on the state of the pandemic, a new CDC recommendation to wear cloth face coverings, and new evidence of pediatric cases and deaths from the coronavirus.<sup>5</sup> CDC officials also informed the Select Subcommittee that many requests from media to interview CDC officials were not granted throughout 2020, including during Dr. Walke’s service as Incident Manager.<sup>6</sup>

Evidence obtained by the Select Subcommittee also sheds new light on previous reports that at least 12 different public health guidelines drafted by CDC scientists were altered, delayed, or blocked by White House officials or other political appointees during the first year of the pandemic.<sup>7</sup> For instance, on August 24, 2020, CDC abruptly changed its testing guidance to assert—contrary to scientific consensus<sup>8</sup>—that most asymptomatic individuals should not be tested even if they were exposed to someone with the coronavirus.<sup>9</sup> During a recent transcribed interview, former White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx stated that then-Special Advisor to the President, Dr. Scott Atlas, was involved in making the changes, which were made specifically to reduce the amount of testing being conducted across the country.<sup>10</sup> On September 18, CDC released revised testing guidance, reinstating the clear

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<sup>4</sup> *CDC to Resume Regular Coronavirus Briefings After Being Sidelined by White House*, CNN (May 30, 2020) (online at [www.cnn.com/2020/05/30/politics/cdc-coronavirus-briefings-resume/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2020/05/30/politics/cdc-coronavirus-briefings-resume/index.html)).

<sup>5</sup> Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Transcribed Interview of Kate Galatas (Sept. 20, 2021); Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Transcribed Interview of Dr. Anne Schuchat (Oct. 1, 2020); *see also* Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Transcribed Interview of Bill Hall (Aug. 31, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> *See, e.g.*, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Transcribed Interview of Kate Galatas (Sept. 20, 2021); Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Transcribed Interview of Dr. Anne Schuchat (Oct. 1, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, *The Trump Administration’s Pattern of Political Interference in the Nation’s Coronavirus Response* (July 26, 2021) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/7.26.2021%20Timeline%20of%20Political%20Interference%20-%20final.pdf>) (incidents 7, 12, 16, 18, 19, 26, 33, 42, 65, 71, 75, 80).

<sup>8</sup> *See id.*; *see also C.D.C. Now Says People Without Covid-19 Symptoms Do Not Need Testing*, New York Times (Aug. 25, 2020) (online at [www.nytimes.com/2020/08/25/health/covid-19-testing-cdc.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/25/health/covid-19-testing-cdc.html)).

<sup>9</sup> Prior to August 24, 2020, CDC’s testing guidance recommended testing for “all close contacts of persons with SARS-CoV-2 infection.” On August 24, CDC changed its testing guidance to say: “You do not necessarily need a test unless you are a vulnerable individual or your health care provider or State or local public health officials recommend you take one.” *Compare* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Overview of Testing for SARS-CoV-2* (July 17, 2020) (online at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200725205821/https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/testing-overview.html>), *with* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Overview of Testing for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)* (Aug. 24, 2020) (online at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200825153255/https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/testing-overview.html>).

<sup>10</sup> Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Transcribed Interview of Dr. Deborah Birx (Oct. 12-13, 2021); *see also* Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Transcribed Interview of Dr. Anne Schuchat (Oct. 1, 2021) (noting that officials outside of CDC were involved in making changes to the testing guidance).

directive that anyone who comes into close contact with an individual infected with the coronavirus should get tested.<sup>11</sup> The revised guidance was authored by Dr. Birx, then-CDC Director Robert Redfield, and Dr. Walke, and was released over “objections from senior White House personnel.”<sup>12</sup>

The Select Subcommittee’s investigations have detailed numerous instances where CDC scientists were pressured to adopt the Trump Administration’s policy positions and talking points, even when they conflicted with science. For instance, it was publicly reported that then-White House Senior Advisor Stephen Miller urged Administration officials in March 2020 to use CDC’s quarantine powers to close the border with Mexico as a pretext to reduce immigration and that Dr. Cetron refused to sign the order.<sup>13</sup> Former CDC Principal Deputy Director Anne Schuchat recently told the Select Subcommittee that she discussed the issue with Dr. Cetron, explaining that he refused to sign the order to close the border with Mexico because:

[T]he bulk of the evidence at that time did not support this policy proposal. ... [H]is view was that the facts on the ground didn’t call for this from a public health reason, and that the decision wasn’t being made based on criteria for quarantine. It may have been initiated for other purposes. So I don’t think he was comfortable using his authority to do that[.]<sup>14</sup>

According to public reporting, the White House exerted pressure on then-CDC Director Redfield, who signed the order over Dr. Cetron’s objections on March 20.<sup>15</sup>

The Select Subcommittee previously released extensive evidence showing that political appointees at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) sought to make changes to at least 13 MMWRs related to the pandemic.<sup>16</sup> Multiple CDC officials have confirmed the relentless pressure campaign from former HHS Senior Advisor Dr. Paul Alexander and other

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<sup>11</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Overview of Testing for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19)* (Sept. 18, 2020) (online at <https://web.archive.org/web/20200919040245/https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/testing-overview.html>).

<sup>12</sup> Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Transcribed Interview of Dr. Deborah Birx (Oct. 13, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, *The Trump Administration’s Pattern of Political Interference in the Nation’s Coronavirus Response* (July 26, 2021) (online at <https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/7.26.2021%20Timeline%20of%20Political%20Interference%20-%20final.pdf>) (incident 9).

<sup>14</sup> Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Transcribed Interview of Dr. Anne Schuchat (Oct. 1, 2021).

<sup>15</sup> *Pence Ordered Borders Closed in March over Objection of CDC Experts*, Los Angeles Times (Oct. 5, 2020) (online at [www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-10-05/mike-pence-close-borders-cdc-experts-refused](http://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-10-05/mike-pence-close-borders-cdc-experts-refused)).

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Chairman James E. Clyburn, Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, to Secretary Alex M. Azar II, Department of Health and Human Services, and Director Robert R. Redfield, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Dec. 21, 2020) (online at [https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/2020-12-21.Clyburn%20to%20Redfield%20and%20Azar%20re%20Subpoena%20FINAL%20\\_0.pdf](https://coronavirus.house.gov/sites/democrats.coronavirus.house.gov/files/2020-12-21.Clyburn%20to%20Redfield%20and%20Azar%20re%20Subpoena%20FINAL%20_0.pdf)).

political appointees to make changes to MMWRs from at least May 2020 through September 2020, which occurred during Dr. Walke's service as Incident Manager.<sup>17</sup> For instance, Dr. Schuchat recently told the Select Subcommittee that Dr. Alexander's attempts to review and make changes to MMWRs were "inappropriate" and breached the longstanding "firewall" in place to protect the independence of the publication. She also noted that it took "active effort" from career CDC staff to preserve the integrity of the MMWRs.<sup>18</sup>

I am deeply concerned by the concerted attempts made by White House officials and other political appointees to interfere with the public health response to the coronavirus crisis. This evidence raises serious questions about what other steps the Trump Administration may have taken or considered.

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For all of these reasons, the Select Subcommittee requests transcribed interviews with the following individuals on the dates listed below:

- Martin Cetron, Director, Division of Global Migration and Quarantine, CDC, December 1, 2021, 9:00 a.m.
- Daniel Jernigan, Deputy Director for Public Health Science and Surveillance, CDC, December 2, 2021, at 9:00 a.m.
- Henry Walke, Director, Division of Preparedness and Emerging Infections, National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases, CDC, December 3, 2021, at 9:00 a.m.

These requests are consistent with the House of Representatives' authorization of the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis "to conduct a full and complete investigation" of "issues related to the coronavirus crisis," including the "preparedness for and response to the coronavirus crisis" and "executive branch policies, deliberations, decisions, activities, and internal and external communications related to the coronavirus crisis."<sup>19</sup>

Please confirm by November 19, 2021, that these individuals will appear voluntarily for transcribed interviews on the dates requested. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Select Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-4400.

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<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Transcribed Interview of Dr. Charlotte Kent (Dec. 7, 2020); Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Transcribed Interview of Dr. Anne Schuchat (Oct. 1, 2021); Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Transcribed Interview of Dr. Christine Casey (Oct. 28, 2021).

<sup>18</sup> Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, Transcribed Interview of Dr. Anne Schuchat (Oct. 1, 2021).

<sup>19</sup> H.Res. 8, sec. 4(f); H.Res. 935, 116th Cong. (2020).

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky  
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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James E. Clyburn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

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James E. Clyburn  
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Steve Scalise, Ranking Member

## Responding to Oversight Committee Document Requests

1. In complying with this request, produce all responsive documents that are in your possession, custody, or control, whether held by you or your past or present agents, employees, and representatives acting on your behalf. Produce all documents that you have a legal right to obtain, that you have a right to copy, or to which you have access, as well as documents that you have placed in the temporary possession, custody, or control of any third party.
2. Requested documents, and all documents reasonably related to the requested documents, should not be destroyed, altered, removed, transferred, or otherwise made inaccessible to the Committee.
3. In the event that any entity, organization, or individual denoted in this request is or has been known by any name other than that herein denoted, the request shall be read also to include that alternative identification.
4. The Committee's preference is to receive documents in electronic form (i.e., CD, memory stick, thumb drive, or secure file transfer) in lieu of paper productions.
5. Documents produced in electronic format should be organized, identified, and indexed electronically.
6. Electronic document productions should be prepared according to the following standards:
  - a. The production should consist of single page Tagged Image File ("TIF"), files accompanied by a Concordance-format load file, an Opticon reference file, and a file defining the fields and character lengths of the load file.
  - b. Document numbers in the load file should match document Bates numbers and TIF file names.
  - c. If the production is completed through a series of multiple partial productions, field names and file order in all load files should match.
  - d. All electronic documents produced to the Committee should include the following fields of metadata specific to each document, and no modifications should be made to the original metadata:  
  
BEGDOC, ENDDOC, TEXT, BEGATTACH, ENDATTACH, PAGECOUNT, CUSTODIAN, RECORDTYPE, DATE, TIME, SENTDATE, SENTTIME, BEGINDATE, BEGINTIME, ENDDATE, ENDTIME, AUTHOR, FROM, CC, TO, BCC, SUBJECT, TITLE, FILENAME, FILEEXT, FILESIZE, DATECREATED, TIMECREATED, DATELASTMOD, TIMELASTMOD,

INTMSGID, INTMSGHEADER, NATIVELINK, INTFILPATH, EXCEPTION,  
BEGATTACH.

7. Documents produced to the Committee should include an index describing the contents of the production. To the extent more than one CD, hard drive, memory stick, thumb drive, zip file, box, or folder is produced, each should contain an index describing its contents.
8. Documents produced in response to this request shall be produced together with copies of file labels, dividers, or identifying markers with which they were associated when the request was served.
9. When you produce documents, you should identify the paragraph(s) or request(s) in the Committee's letter to which the documents respond.
10. The fact that any other person or entity also possesses non-identical or identical copies of the same documents shall not be a basis to withhold any information.
11. The pendency of or potential for litigation shall not be a basis to withhold any information.
12. In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(d), the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and any statutory exemptions to FOIA shall not be a basis for withholding any information.
13. Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552a(b)(9), the Privacy Act shall not be a basis for withholding information.
14. If compliance with the request cannot be made in full by the specified return date, compliance shall be made to the extent possible by that date. An explanation of why full compliance is not possible shall be provided along with any partial production.
15. In the event that a document is withheld on the basis of privilege, provide a privilege log containing the following information concerning any such document: (a) every privilege asserted; (b) the type of document; (c) the general subject matter; (d) the date, author, addressee, and any other recipient(s); (e) the relationship of the author and addressee to each other; and (f) the basis for the privilege(s) asserted.
16. If any document responsive to this request was, but no longer is, in your possession, custody, or control, identify the document (by date, author, subject, and recipients), and explain the circumstances under which the document ceased to be in your possession, custody, or control.
17. If a date or other descriptive detail set forth in this request referring to a document is inaccurate, but the actual date or other descriptive detail is known to you or is otherwise apparent from the context of the request, produce all documents that would be responsive as if the date or other descriptive detail were correct.



18. This request is continuing in nature and applies to any newly-discovered information. Any record, document, compilation of data, or information not produced because it has not been located or discovered by the return date shall be produced immediately upon subsequent location or discovery.
19. All documents shall be Bates-stamped sequentially and produced sequentially.
20. Two sets of each production shall be delivered, one set to the Majority Staff and one set to the Minority Staff. When documents are produced to the Committee, production sets shall be delivered to the Majority Staff in Room 2157 of the Rayburn House Office Building and the Minority Staff in Room 2105 of the Rayburn House Office Building.
21. Upon completion of the production, submit a written certification, signed by you or your counsel, stating that: (1) a diligent search has been completed of all documents in your possession, custody, or control that reasonably could contain responsive documents; and (2) all documents located during the search that are responsive have been produced to the Committee.

### **Definitions**

1. The term “document” means any written, recorded, or graphic matter of any nature whatsoever, regardless of how recorded, and whether original or copy, including, but not limited to, the following: memoranda, reports, expense reports, books, manuals, instructions, financial reports, data, working papers, records, notes, letters, notices, confirmations, telegrams, receipts, appraisals, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, prospectuses, communications, electronic mail (email), contracts, cables, notations of any type of conversation, telephone call, meeting or other inter-office or intra-office communication, bulletins, printed matter, computer printouts, teletypes, invoices, transcripts, diaries, analyses, returns, summaries, minutes, bills, accounts, estimates, projections, comparisons, messages, correspondence, press releases, circulars, financial statements, reviews, opinions, offers, studies and investigations, questionnaires and surveys, and work sheets (and all drafts, preliminary versions, alterations, modifications, revisions, changes, and amendments of any of the foregoing, as well as any attachments or appendices thereto), and graphic or oral records or representations of any kind (including without limitation, photographs, charts, graphs, microfiche, microfilm, videotape, recordings and motion pictures), and electronic, mechanical, and electric records or representations of any kind (including, without limitation, tapes, cassettes, disks, and recordings) and other written, printed, typed, or other graphic or recorded matter of any kind or nature, however produced or reproduced, and whether preserved in writing, film, tape, disk, videotape, or otherwise. A document bearing any notation not a part of the original text is to be considered a separate document. A draft or non-identical copy is a separate document within the meaning of this term.
2. The term “communication” means each manner or means of disclosure or exchange of information, regardless of means utilized, whether oral, electronic, by document or otherwise, and whether in a meeting, by telephone, facsimile, mail, releases, electronic

message including email (desktop or mobile device), text message, instant message, MMS or SMS message, message application, or otherwise.

3. The terms “and” and “or” shall be construed broadly and either conjunctively or disjunctively to bring within the scope of this request any information that might otherwise be construed to be outside its scope. The singular includes plural number, and vice versa. The masculine includes the feminine and neutral genders.
4. The term “including” shall be construed broadly to mean “including, but not limited to.”
5. The term “Company” means the named legal entity as well as any units, firms, partnerships, associations, corporations, limited liability companies, trusts, subsidiaries, affiliates, divisions, departments, branches, joint ventures, proprietorships, syndicates, or other legal, business or government entities over which the named legal entity exercises control or in which the named entity has any ownership whatsoever.
6. The term “identify,” when used in a question about individuals, means to provide the following information: (a) the individual’s complete name and title; (b) the individual’s business or personal address and phone number; and (c) any and all known aliases.
7. The term “related to” or “referring or relating to,” with respect to any given subject, means anything that constitutes, contains, embodies, reflects, identifies, states, refers to, deals with, or is pertinent to that subject in any manner whatsoever.
8. The term “employee” means any past or present agent, borrowed employee, casual employee, consultant, contractor, de facto employee, detailee, fellow, independent contractor, intern, joint adventurer, loaned employee, officer, part-time employee, permanent employee, provisional employee, special government employee, subcontractor, or any other type of service provider.
9. The term “individual” means all natural persons and all persons or entities acting on their behalf.