Peter Thomas  
Disability and Rehabilitation Research Coalition  
1501 M Street, NW, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20005  

Dear Mr. Thomas:  

Thank you for your letter to Eric Hargan, Acting Secretary, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), regarding media reports alleging that HHS and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are prohibited from using certain words in budget documents.  

As I have stated to CDC staff, partners, and the media, there are no banned words at CDC. We will continue to talk about all of our important public health programs and to use the best scientific evidence available to improve the health of all Americans. CDC also strongly encourages the use of outcome and evidence data in program evaluations and budget decisions.  

CDC has a long-standing history of making public health decisions based on the best available science and data and for the benefit of all people—and we will continue to do so. As part of our commitment to provide for the common defense of the country against health threats, science is and will remain the foundation of our work. In an agency-wide message to CDC employees, I affirmed the agency’s commitment to keep science as the foundation of the agency’s work.  

CDC used a Congressional Justification guidance resource, which is an internal, technical document distributed to budget staff in each of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) operating divisions, to help those participating in the budget formulation process. The HHS guidance provides general procedures for development of Congressional Justifications, and facilitates consistency across the budget formulation process. It also provides suggestions of terms to use, as well as overused words to be avoided.  

Thank you for your letter and your interest in CDC’s public health efforts. Please share this response with the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Coalition and its member organizations.  

Sincerely,  

Brenda Fitzgerald, MD  
Director, CDC