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## LEGAL

# Breaking: Children's Health Defense Hits AAP With RICO Suit Over Fraudulent Vaccine Safety Claims

*Children's Health Defense (CHD) and five other plaintiffs today accused the American Academy of Pediatrics of running a decades-long racketeering scheme to defraud American families about the safety of the childhood vaccine schedule. CHD filed the RICO suit in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia*

by **Michael Nevrakakis, Ph.D., Brenda Baletti, Ph.D.**

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In a **lawsuit filed today** in federal court, Children's Health Defense (CHD) and five other plaintiffs accused the **American Academy of Pediatrics** (AAP) of running a decades-long racketeering scheme to defraud American families about the safety of the childhood vaccine schedule.

The suit alleges that the AAP violated the **Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act** (RICO) by making "false and fraudulent" claims about the safety of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) **childhood immunization schedule** — while receiving funding from **vaccine** manufacturers and providing financial incentives to pediatricians who achieve high vaccination rates.

"For too long, the AAP has been held up on a pedestal, as if it were a font of science and integrity," said **CHD** CEO Mary Holland. "Sadly, that's not the case."

Instead, Holland said, the AAP “is a front operation in a racketeering scheme involving **Big Pharma**, Big Medicine and Big Media, ready at every turn to put **profits** above children’s health. It’s time to face facts and see what the AAP is really about,” Holland said.

According to the complaint, the AAP has worked to conceal the findings of studies that the Institute of Medicine (IOM) — now known as the **National Academy of Medicine** — published in **2002** and **2013**.

The IOM called for more research after concluding that no studies had ever been conducted to compare the health outcomes of vaccinated and unvaccinated children.

The AAP’s conduct constitutes a **pattern of fraud under RICO**, a statute often used to prosecute organized crime, said **Rick Jaffe**, attorney for the plaintiffs.

Jaffe told **The Defender** that while previous lawsuits “challenged individual vaccines or sought compensation for individual injuries,” this “is a fraud case following the playbook that took down Big Tobacco.”

“The AAP’s actions parallel those of Big Tobacco, which misled the public regarding the safety of its products,” Jaffe said. “Tobacco created false uncertainty to manufacture doubt. The AAP did the inverse — it created false certainty to foreclose questions. Both used the trappings of science to prevent actual science.”

CHD General Counsel Kim Mack Rosenberg said the lawsuit shows “the close ties between entities and individuals who work toward the same purpose — propping up the vaccine industry and those who profit from it.”

The AAP is the largest pediatric trade group in the U.S., with **67,000 members**.

The lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, seeks financial damages for the individual plaintiffs. It also asks the court to require the AAP to disclose the “lack of comprehensive safety testing” of **vaccines**, and bar the AAP from making “further unqualified safety claims” about vaccines.

Drs. **Paul Thomas** and **Kenneth Stoller** — physicians whose professional reputations were harmed for opposing AAP's guidelines, and the parents of four children who died or were injured after receiving routine childhood vaccinations, are among the plaintiffs.

### **Lawsuit: AAP's childhood vaccine safety claims based on 'foundational fraud'**

According to the lawsuit, the AAP's claims about vaccine safety rest on a "foundational fraud" — namely, a 2002 article by pediatrician **Dr. Paul Offit**, published in the journal **Pediatrics**. The article claims that infants can "theoretically" receive up to 10,000 vaccines at once without posing a health risk.

The AAP "deployed this theoretical reassurance" to block the IOM studies and questions about the safety of the childhood schedule, to assure parents, doctors and policymakers that the **vaccine schedule was thoroughly tested**, the complaint states.

The AAP incorporated Offit's claims into its flagship **Red Book** — its guide to the prevention, management and control of pediatric diseases. "Pediatricians learned to cite the 10,000 vaccines figure when parents expressed concern," **the complaint** states.

"The Red Book is their Bible. When AAP says the schedule is safe, that's what parents hear in examination rooms across America," Jaffe said.

"Offit's theoretical PR article did not study, and could not prove, the safety of the cumulative schedule," according to the complaint. Yet the pediatricians who deviate from this standard of care have faced professional and personal consequences.

### **'AAP turned pediatricians into vaccine delivery systems'**

Thomas and Stoller, the two pediatricians who are suing the AAP, said they suffered professional and economic harm after questioning vaccine safety claims.

In 2020, Thomas co-authored research, now retracted, comparing the health outcomes of **vaccinated and unvaccinated children**. Days later, the Oregon Medical Board **suspended Thomas**, citing his deviation from AAP protocols and calling him a

"threat to public health."

"I was forced to abandon my patients, something highly illegal," Thomas said. "There was economic damage in the millions and devastating stress and emotional duress."

Stoller also faced professional discipline and reputational harm, according to the complaint. He lost his medical license in **California** and **New Mexico** after he granted medical exemptions to vaccine mandates.

"AAP turned pediatricians into vaccine delivery systems and destroyed the ones who asked questions," Jaffe said.

### **AAP guidelines led to children's vaccine-related deaths and injuries**

The AAP's "Red Book" vaccine recommendations contributed to the deaths and injuries of three of the plaintiffs' children, according to the lawsuit.

Idaho resident Andrea Shaw's two children — fraternal **twins Dallas and Tyson Shaw** — both died last year, eight days after receiving their 18-month vaccines.

According to the complaint, the Shaw family's physician dismissed the parents' warnings about the family's history of adverse reactions to the flu vaccine. The doctor was following AAP guidance, "which does not generally recognize family history of vaccine reactions."

A day after their vaccination, Shaw's children were taken to the emergency room for a series of symptoms documented as "post-immunization reaction, initial encounter."

A week later, the children died. Local authorities launched a homicide investigation against their mother, based on the suspicion that she caused their deaths. The **investigation is still active**.

New York resident Shanticia Nelson's **1-year-old daughter, Sa'Niya Carter**, died last year of cardiac arrest after having **seizures** roughly 12 hours after receiving six "catch-up" injections containing 12 vaccines.

Nelson told doctors she was concerned about giving her daughter so many vaccines at once, because the child was sick at the time. However, healthcare workers told Nelson that the “catch-up” regimen and vaccinating a “mildly ill” child were safe, according to the AAP.

Carter’s death certificate listed “sudden unexpected death in childhood” as the official cause of death. However, the coroner found signs of **encephalitis**, a **condition** linked to the DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis) vaccine, which Carter had received.

“Shaw and Nelson’s stories show what happens when AAP’s paradigm corrupts medical judgment at the point of care,” the complaint states.

Plaintiff Jane Doe’s daughter, “E,” a high school student in New York, sustained anaphylactic reactions after getting three routine childhood vaccines.

The student later obtained a medical exemption from all further vaccinations. But in 2024, her school’s medical consultant revoked the exemption — and two more exemptions “E” had obtained — citing AAP guidelines.

After school officials said she couldn’t return to school unless she complied with state vaccine mandates, “E” became suicidal — so her parents allowed her to “catch up” on her vaccines.

After getting those shots, “E” had a severe allergic reaction and was diagnosed with **arthropathy**, a joint disease, requiring surgery and ongoing care. Arthropathy has been linked to the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine, which “E” had received.

“Jane Doe’s story shows what happens when treating physicians get it right and the AAP paradigm overrides them,” the complaint states.

### **Complaint highlights AAP’s conflict of interest with vaccine makers**

The AAP maintains financial relationships with **vaccine manufacturers**, including Pfizer, Merck, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and Sanofi Pasteur, and also with the **federal government**. However, the group doesn’t disclose these relationships in its policy statements and public safety assurances, according to the complaint.

This has led to conflicts of interest, including the formation of an "**association-in-fact enterprise**," referring to "individuals or entities that operate together for a common purpose without forming a formal legal entity."

"The same pharmaceutical conglomerates that serve as enterprise participants in manufacturing childhood vaccines have systematically acquired companies treating the **chronic conditions** those vaccines cause, creating a closed-loop system that financializes childhood illness," the complaint states.

The complaint alleges that AAP has subsequently resisted any changes to the childhood vaccination schedule, including those enacted under the leadership of U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Last year, the AAP and other medical organizations **sued Kennedy** and other federal health officials and agencies. The groups seek to roll back the changes the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) made to the childhood schedule. Last week, **the AAP updated its complaint** after **HHS reduced the number of recommended childhood vaccines** from 17 to 11 earlier this month.

The AAP last year **released its own** "evidence-based" **immunization schedule**, identical to the CDC's childhood immunization schedule as it was before Kennedy became health secretary. Several states have **adopted the AAP's schedule**.

AAP later rejected the CDC **Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices** (ACIP) vote to end hepatitis B shots for newborns, claiming **children will "die"** as a result. **HHS removed AAP members** from ACIP work groups last year. AAP's updated lawsuit also asks the court to block ACIP's next meeting in February.

In a separate lawsuit filed last month, the AAP demanded HHS **restore \$12 million in research grants** that **HHS withdrew** last year. Last week, a federal judge **reinstated the funding**. AAP has also called for the **prohibition of religious and philosophical exemptions** to vaccination.

When HHS "has attempted reform, AAP leads the opposition," the complaint states.

Mack Rosenberg said the AAP "fails to follow the actual science" in its lawsuits. Instead, the organization relies "only on that which supports its position that the childhood schedule is 'safe and effective.'"

## **Plaintiffs compare AAP's actions to those of Big Tobacco**

The complaint draws parallels between AAP's actions and tobacco companies' efforts to conceal the dangers of smoking, which the U.S. Department of Justice prosecuted in a landmark RICO case, **U.S. v. Philip Morris USA**.

In the Philip Morris case, a federal court found that the tobacco industry was liable for denials about the health risks of tobacco spanning several decades.

The complaint states there are parallels between the AAP's actions and those of Big Tobacco, including "suppression of adverse research, use of 'independent' scientific voices to block studies, and coordinated enterprise activity to mislead the public."

This is the latest in a series of **lawsuits** CHD has filed. These include lawsuits against:

- The **federal Countermeasures Injury Compensation Program**, which oversees **COVID-19** vaccine injury compensation claims.
- The U.S. Department of Defense over its "**sham**" **religious exemption policies**,
- The state of New York, alleging its **prohibition of religious exemptions** is unconstitutional.

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