

Testimony by Tom Doran

Before the United States Senate Special Committee on Aging

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My name is **Tom Doran**, and I'm turning **65 this month**. I'm here to speak on behalf of my wife's parents—ages **85 and 84**—and the generation they represent: the people who built our neighborhoods, raised our families, and made our communities strong, only to watch much of it vanish in the **Palisades Fire**.

I never imagined that at this stage in life—when I should be planning for retirement—I'd be standing here telling you how my family lost everything in the **Palisades Fire**, and how we're still trying to piece our lives back together 9 months later.

My in-laws moved into their home over **60 years ago**. It wasn't just a house—it was the center of our family's history. My wife grew up there. Both of our children celebrated every birthday there. It was where holidays, graduations, and Sunday dinners took place—where life unfolded for three generations, soon to be four as my daughter is pregnant with my first grandson.

That day, there were **no sirens, no real warning**—just wind, smoke, and confusion.

I watched my **85-year-old father-in-law** carry a hose, trying to save his neighbor's home and his own. He didn't hesitate. He fought until the winds became so strong that we had to physically pull him away. Moments later, the home he built, the one my wife grew up in, was gone. I stayed with my sons until the water gave out at 10pm and watched decades of memories, hard work, and stability be erased.

It's hard to describe what it feels like to watch a lifetime of work and memories go up in flames. My in-laws lost everything they had worked for—every photo, keepsake, and reminder of their life together. And for our family, three generations lost an anchor.

That house wasn't just theirs—it was the heart of all of ours.

The days and weeks that followed were filled with confusion, exhaustion, and disbelief. We were navigating **insurance claims, FEMA, and temporary housing**, all while making sure my in-laws had their medications, medical care, and emotional support.

It became clear almost immediately that **these systems are not built for the elderly**.

Everything—from online forms and digital portals to endless hold times—assumes physical mobility, technological literacy, and mental endurance that most seniors simply don't have.

My in-laws can't sit on hold for hours, upload digital photos, or manage multiple accounts. Every step in the process was overwhelming.

So the family stepped in. We helped with the paperwork, the phone calls, the follow-ups, and the appointments. I'm 65 years old myself, still working full-time, and trying to manage my own family's recovery—because our home burned too.

And even now, **nine months later**, we are still **cataloging every single possession we owned** for insurance purposes. Every pot, every book, every photograph—line by line—while it's abundantly clear that it was a **total loss**. The emotional toll of having to re-live what we lost, just to prove it, is staggering.

For elderly survivors like my in-laws, this process is not just inefficient—it's inhumane.

The fire didn't just take their home—it took their health, stability, and confidence.

My **mother-in-law**, survived multiple **strokes** and needed **emergency surgery** not long after the fire. My **father-in-law**, who used to drive her everywhere and tend the yard relies on family.

The loss of their home and independence has aged them visibly. My father-in-law still talks about the roses he planted in the front yard 50 years ago. My mother-in-law, once vibrant and social, now struggles to find her footing in a new and unfamiliar community.. Their routines, their sense of safety, and their place in the world—all of it changed overnight.

And the ripple effects have touched every generation in our family. My wife lost the home she grew up in. My children lost the home where they spent their childhood holidays. I've had to watch the people I love most struggle to find footing in a system that doesn't seem to see them.

The trauma didn't stop when the fire went out. It has stayed with us—emotional, financial, generational.

My in-laws' story isn't unique. They are part of a generation that spent their lives doing everything right—saving, planning, maintaining their homes, and giving back to their communities. But when disaster struck, they were left to navigate a world that no longer works for them.

So many elderly survivors are still displaced—living in temporary rentals, isolated from their doctors, their friends, and the neighborhoods they once held together. And without family to help, many have simply fallen through the cracks.

For families like ours, that help comes with its own toll. We've become their advocates, their drivers, their case managers—all while trying to rebuild our own lives. It's a full-time job on top of a full-time job. And we're the lucky ones. We have each other.

There are countless seniors out there who don't.

This experience has made one thing clear: **our disaster recovery systems are not built for aging populations—or for the families trying to support them.**

We need:

- **Simplified disaster assistance systems** that do not rely solely on technology.
- **Case managers** trained to guide elderly survivors and their families through the entire process.

- **Accessible temporary and permanent housing** for seniors who can't rebuild on their own.
- **Mental health and grief support** for those coping with trauma and displacement.
- **Insurance reform**, so that those who lost everything aren't forced to relive their trauma just to prove the obvious.

Because when someone in their eighties loses everything, it's not about "starting over." It's about preserving dignity, safety, and connection in the years they have left.

My in-laws are still with us. They're still together. They're still showing us what strength looks like. But the systems around them have not shown that same strength back.

When we talk about recovery, we often focus on rebuilding structures—but recovery for the elderly is about **rebuilding people**: their confidence, their routines, and their sense of belonging.

We owe it to them—the generation that built these communities—to make sure they are not forgotten after the flames.

Thank you.