

Testimony of Rachel Schwartz  
U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging Field Hearing  
November 13, 2025

Dear Chairman Scott,

My name is Rachel Schwartz, and I am 94 years old. I don't usually testify at government hearings, but I felt I had to. I have been through a lot in my life. As a little girl, I survived three concentration camps and a three-week march before being freed by the Russians. Somehow, by God's grace, I made it through. I came to this country, started over, and made a life I was proud of. For the past twenty-five years, I lived peacefully in my home in the Pacific Palisades. It was my safe place filled with memories, family photos, and the comfort I had waited my whole life to feel.

Then the fire came. I watched everything I owned disappear in the flames. At my age, it's not easy to begin again. I've been with my insurance company for over 25 years, always paid my premiums, never missed a payment, and now they tell me they will only cover about half of what I need to rebuild. It's not right. There are many seniors here in the Palisades who are in the same situation. We've all done our part, lived honest lives, and now we're left with almost nothing. It doesn't seem fair after all these years.

Senator, I am not asking for pity. I am asking for help not just for me, but for everyone who has lost their home and feels forgotten. Please, do what you can to make sure insurance companies are held to their promises, especially for older people who have been loyal customers for decades. We just want to live out our remaining years with dignity and peace, in the homes and communities we love.

Thank you for allowing me to testify.

## Testimony of Bruce Schwartz

U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging Field Hearing

November 13, 2025

My name is Bruce Schwartz. Rachel is my mom. I've been a resident of Pacific Palisades for 25 years, and during that time, I've had the honor of serving as the Honorary Fire Chief and being recognized as Citizen of the Year for my efforts to promote fire safety in our community.

On October 23, 2024, our Homeowners Association's insurance policy was dropped by State Farm. The only coverage we could obtain was through the California FAIR Plan—at twice the cost and for less than half the coverage.

Just 76 days later, tragedy struck. Seventeen of the 25 homes in our townhome community burned to the ground. We were so severely underinsured that rebuilding required an affirmative vote of 75% of our homeowners. That vote failed—because some owners whose homes did not burn refused to approve an assessment to help those of us who lost everything.

So now, we have no home, and no right even to rebuild one.

To make matters worse, some of my neighbors will be forced to surrender their homes to their lenders. And they will face devastating tax consequences on the cancellation of debt, because the federal \$750,000 exemption for forgiven mortgage debt has not been extended into 2026. Imagine losing your home—and then being taxed on the loss.

How can our government allow this to happen to its most vulnerable citizens?

California's policies have created a broken insurance market. The State allowed this fire to smolder for six days on State land—fully aware that Santa Ana winds were approaching. When the winds came, the fire reignited with catastrophic force. Meanwhile, the Los Angeles Fire Department had no water pressure because the reservoir was down for maintenance. Firefighters were forced to abandon our community and tell residents to “run for their lives.”

Now, we are left with nothing. Eventually, we will receive insurance checks covering less than 20% of losses. And many of my neighbors—already traumatized—will face hundreds of thousands of dollars in new tax liabilities.

Again, I ask: how is any of this fair? How is this justice for the hardworking citizens who did everything right, only to be left with nothing?

We deeply appreciate your presence today and your willingness to investigate this matter. Our community needs help, accountability, and real reform.

Thank you.