



SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

Chairman Bob Casey

Chairman Bob Casey's Opening Statement
"21st Century Caregiving: Supporting Workers, Family Caregivers, Seniors and People with Disabilities"
June 17, 2021

The Senate Special Committee on Aging will come to order. Today's hearing takes place as COVID-19 vaccination rates continue to climb and states across the country are opening up their economies. We can finally see the light at the end of this dark tunnel. Now, we must learn from the devastation brought on by COVID-19. We know that the pandemic exposed long-standing challenges American families confront each and every day. The pandemic highlighted the essential value of care—both that supported by a professional workforce and that of unpaid family caregivers.

At today's hearing, our witnesses will speak about the caregiving economy, both paid and unpaid, and what is needed to ensure seniors and people with disabilities have access to the supports they need. Medicaid home and community-based services enable more than 3.5 million people to remain in their homes, stay active in their communities and to lead independent lives. This assistance often includes help with activities of daily living, such as eating, bathing and managing medications. But too many Americans, likely millions more, are not able to access these services, placing significant financial and emotional strain on families.

We know that almost 820,000 Americans already languish on wait lists for Medicaid home and community-based services, sometimes waiting for these services for years. Sometimes waiting for these services for years. That is one reason why President Biden proposed a historic \$400 billion investment over 8 years in these essential services as part of the American Jobs Plan. Congress is currently debating the contours of legislation to invest in our infrastructure and fix our Nation's long-neglected roadways and bridges just by way of example of other parts of that bill. For millions of families across the country, and especially for women, there bridge to work might be a physical bridge but it could be a bridge to care, home and community-based services bridge. Whether it is home and community-based services or child care.

The President's investment will make it possible for more Americans to receive high-quality services and supports. This investment will allow them to live in their own homes, participate in their communities, go to school and hold a job. And it will help the family members who are often the unrecognized and unpaid caregivers, providing support every day. This investment is about services, but it's definitely about jobs. We must turn these jobs into good quality, family-sustaining jobs. In Pennsylvania, the median wage for a direct care worker is just \$11.99 per hour, and many have few or no benefits. And, as we will hear today, the majority of these workers are women and from communities of color. Among home care workers, 62 percent are people of color. An investment in these essential workers is long overdue.

A little over a month ago, I spoke to Lisa Savage from Philadelphia. Lisa left her career of more than 20 years to become a home care worker in order to support her son, Brandon, who was shot and left paralyzed while at home on a break from college. Lisa

Savage said the following to me, “As a home care worker, we are essential.— we are essential because we care for the elderly, and we care for people with disabilities at home.” She’s right, and an investment in her essential work is critical, and investment of home care workers across the country, is long overdue. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about these important issues.

Before we begin, I want to remind Committee Members and witnesses to please keep their remarks and questions to five minutes. The countdown timer can be viewed alongside the other participant windows on WebEx. Following opening remarks, Senators will ask their questions based on seniority, and I ask that Members have their cameras turned on a few minutes prior to their questions. With those final logistical notes, Ranking Member Scott, I am pleased to turn it over to you for your opening remarks.