

Chairman Bob Casey
Opening Statement
July 15, 2021

The Senate Special Committee on Aging will come to order. I'd like to welcome everyone to the Aging Committee's first hybrid hearing of this Congress, with Members having the option to attend in person or on-line. So welcome, everyone.

This hearing will focus on the challenges individuals face when working to achieve long-term financial security and save for a stable retirement. All Americans worry about their economic future, especially as we grow older. For people with disabilities, finances, savings and income are especially worrisome issues. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2020, across all age groups, people with disabilities were much less likely to be employed than those with no disabilities. The same report found that across all educational attainment groups, unemployment rates for people with a disability were higher than for those without a disability. Because people with disabilities are less likely to be employed and much more likely to be underemployed, their life-time earnings are far less than the average citizen. And because family members are often forced to quit their jobs to help care for other family members, family income has often been significantly limited. For these families, Congress has removed some of the barriers to saving and to planning for the future.

The bipartisan Stephen E. Beck Achieving a Better Life Experience Act, or as we know it, by the acronym, the ABLE Act, which Senator Burr and I led in the Senate, when it passed in 2014. This act makes it possible for people with disabilities to save for the future. With an ABLE account, people with disabilities can save for the future without losing their federal disability benefits, such as Supplemental Security Income or Medicaid. With the opening of ABLE accounts in 43 states, over 91,000 people have been able to save over \$759 million, an average of over \$8,300 per account. These essential assets allow people to open their own businesses, save for retirement, purchase the technology they need and so much more. That includes in my home state of Pennsylvania, over 5,200 people who have used ABLE accounts to save over \$57 million so far. One such Pennsylvanian is a member of our witness panel today, Dr. Badger, who will tell us how an ABLE account helped her buy her first home. ABLE has made building wealth a real possibility for millions of Americans, but our work on this issue is not done. ABLE accounts are not available to all people with disabilities. To open an account, a person has to acquire their disability prior to their 26th birthday.

This needs to change. Many people acquire their disability after age 26, including over 1 million veterans. That's why Senator Jerry Moran of Kansas and I, along with 10 additional colleagues, four Republicans and six Democrats, have introduced Senate bill, S. 331, the bipartisan ABLE Age Adjustment Act. The bipartisan House version, which is H.R. 1219, has been introduced by Representatives Tony Cardenas and Judy Chu of California and Cathy McMorris Rodgers of the state of Washington. They have been joined by 39 Democrats and 20 Republicans to help pass this important legislation. The ABLE Age Adjustment Act will provide 6 million additional Americans with disabilities with the opportunity to open an ABLE account. The ABLE Age

Adjustment Act legislation is an important step toward a more stable economic future for people with disabilities, but there remain other challenges which must be addressed.

As we will hear today, barriers to economic independence also plague many communities of color. Higher levels of poverty and unemployment have made it more difficult to save long-term for many people from African American, Latinx and other diverse communities. This is a disturbing set of numbers I'm about to read. A 2020 report from the Federal Reserve, and that's obviously very recent, estimated that white families had eight times, eight times, the wealth of the typical Black family and five times the wealth of the typical Hispanic family. No one can be satisfied with those numbers. The same report also found that the asset-based net worth of White households was more than four times the level of Black households. So as a nation, we've only begun to address the barriers to economic security for people with disabilities and communities of color as they age. So I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about these important issues and the progress we hope to be able to make.

Before we begin, I want to remind Committee Members and witnesses to please keep their remarks and questions to five minutes. Following opening remarks, Senators will ask questions based on seniority, whether joining in person or by camera virtually. So Ranking Member Scott, I am pleased to turn it over to you for your opening remarks. It's great to see you in person.