



Chairman's Opening Remarks March 12th Hearing

The U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging will now come to order.

Today, I want to address the tragedy of rising social isolation and loneliness among American seniors.

Americans have never had more opportunities for connection than we do today, but studies are repeatedly warning that feelings of isolation and loneliness are rising dramatically, especially among elderly Americans.

This is a problem and here's why it should matter to everyone in this room and the American people: the cycle of loneliness in seniors impacts all of us and if we don't figure it out now, we are dooming future generations to suffer the same negative impacts of isolation.

We can and must do better. Combatting the feeling of isolation and loneliness for our aging community has endless benefits – from better mental and physical health to stronger, multigenerational relationships with families and communities.

Another benefit to reducing isolation and loneliness is that this is critical in our fight against scams.

The internet and social media are great for many things, but when isolated and lonely seniors turn to the internet for companionship and social interaction, they are far more likely to become victims of scams.

It's heartbreaking because this only fuels a cycle of negative outcomes for vulnerable older Americans.

That's why, last week, I was proud to be joined by Senator Mark Kelly and several of our colleagues on the Aging Committee to introduce and pass a resolution designating

March 6th as National Slam the Scam Day and working to raise awareness of scams targeting older Americans.

Seniors have lost so much to scams, in many cases their identities or their life savings.

Seniors are attacked with grandparent scams, financial services scams, tech support scams, government impersonation scams, romance scams, among others.

All of these scams are even more effective with seniors who are struggling with loneliness, isolation, and depression.

In 2023, people over 60 lost a combined \$3.4 billion to fraud worldwide. We need to put an end to this.

This is something that every American should be worried about. I know that every member of this committee wants to put an end to this critical issue.

I'm glad that Pam Bondi is our Attorney General and Kash Patel is the director of the FBI. I'm confident they will fight for every senior in our country and make sure that criminals are held accountable for their despicable crimes.

Beyond preventing scams, tackling the issues associated with loneliness are key to my goal as Chairman of this committee to improve the wellness of American seniors, and I know the Ranking Members has the same goal.

In our first hearing, I outlined four issues for this Committee to focus on as we work to improve the wellness of America's seniors. One of those four issues was improving family and community support, and that is so important because when seniors feel they have purpose and are part of a community, they thrive.

The sad reality we face today is that a growing number of senior citizens are suffering from mental and physical health issues, largely driven by an epidemic of loneliness.

Despite public health officials sounding the alarm, the issue has not yet been addressed through any major legislation.

This is why I introduced the Social Engagement and Network Initiatives for Older Relief or SENIOR Act to address senior loneliness.

I am proud to have the support of Argentum, the Foundation for Social Connection Action Network, and the YMCA, who are all represented here today by our witnesses.

The SENIOR Act has also been endorsed by Meals on Wheels.

Finally, I think it is incredibly important to recognize the impact that COVID had on our seniors. Due to shutdowns and restrictions in places like hospitals, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes, many seniors weren't allowed to be near their children or grandchildren or any of their loved ones. In many cases, they were completely isolated to their own rooms.

This was heartbreaking to see. We all know the importance of community and social interaction for our seniors and the great health benefits it has.

We had so many seniors that weren't even allowed to have their loved ones next to them during their time of need or their last moments on this earth.

We all know that seniors contribute greatly when given opportunities to be active members in their communities.

Combating the feeling of isolation and loneliness for our aging community has endless benefits – from better mental and physical health to stronger, multigenerational relationships with families and communities.

I hope to make significant progress on this issue to end loneliness and isolation among seniors, pass my SENIOR Act, and work together to improve the wellness of older Americans.

I look forward to hearing your testimony and working with my colleagues on next steps to fight this issue.

I'd now like to recognize Ranking Member Kirsten Gillibrand for her opening statement.

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