

U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY



CHAIRMAN Special Committee on Aging

Chairman Bob Casey's Opening Statement "Uplifting Families, Workers, and Older Adults: Supporting Communities of Care" March 9, 2023

The Senate Special Committee on Aging will come to order. Thank you everyone for being here for the first Aging Committee hearing of this new Congress. And we're grateful we could start in such a big room. We usually don't have the big room. So, we're grateful for that. But I do want to welcome everyone today and to thank you for being here today – those in the audience and those who are providing testimony. I am delighted that Senator Mike Braun of Indiana will serve as the new Ranking Member of the Committee. He's been not only a member of the Committee, but a very diligent member. He's been to a lot of hearings. And we're grateful for that and grateful for his work as Ranking Member. I wanted to start as well by welcoming the new members of the Committee and as many of you know, at these Committee hearings, especially on a Thursday, where we often have our hearings, people are in and out. Members are going to multiple hearings. I was almost much later for this hearing because I had to testify briefly at a hearing on the derailment in Ohio that affected Pennsylvania as well. So, you'll see Senators who will come in and out. But we have three new Members of the Committee who are also new Members of the Senate. Sen. JD Vance of Ohio, Sen. Pete Ricketts of Nebraska, and Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania. So, we're grateful for their membership of the Committee and look forward to working with them and their contributions over the next two years. And as many of you know, the Aging Committee has historically been a committee that fosters both bipartisanship and collaboration, as we examine difficult issues facing so many older Americans. And as I continue as Chairman, I hope to continue the same spirit of bipartisanship and advance an agenda to build both health and economic security for seniors, people with disabilities, and their families.

Today's hearing will discuss the caregiving workforce, both paid and unpaid, and those who are providing, so-called, the acronym – because everything in Washington has an acronym – HCBS, Home and Community Based Services. And so important to focus on that. The United States is in the midst, right now, of a caregiving crisis. There's no other way to describe it. And HCBS services are not only important, but they are not readily available for those who need them. And we've got to change that. We've got a lot of work to do to accomplish that. In a new report just released last week, ANCOR and United Cerebral Palsy

found that 63 percent of home care providers have discontinued services or programs because of staffing shortages. 83 percent of service providers reported turning away families because they don't have the staff to provide services. The report also found that 92 percent of service providers are struggling to meet quality standards because of lack of staffing. 92 percent of service providers having a staffing problem. When it comes to the staff who are providing this critical, backbreaking work, home care workers often struggle to support their own families because they are paid an average of just \$19,000 per year. This workforce, the majority of whom are women of color, are more likely to live in poverty than the general public.

Many work only for their wages and have few or no benefits, including paid leave or even sick leave. It is time we make the smart economic choice for the county, to help our families, to invest in our families, to invest in caregivers and strengthen this workforce by making a generational investment in home care services. That's why in January, I reintroduced, with 39 co-sponsors, the Better Care Better Jobs Act (S. 100). Should be easy to remember that. This bill focuses on home and community-based services (HCBS). And I want to describe what those are. Some people have a general sense of it. Here's what we're talking about when we talk about so-called HCBS. A variety of medical and human services that enable older adults and people with disabilities who need assistance to live in their own homes or in a home-like setting and remain part of their communities instead of living in an institutional setting. Now most institutional settings do a really good job and people can get really good care there. But Americans should have another option, and most Americans do not have that other option. Home and community-based services can include the following: assistance with activities of daily living; home health care, of course; physical and occupational therapy; skilled nursing care – like you receive in an institutional setting like a nursing home; home meal deliveries can be part of this; transportation, and so more. This bill, the Better Care Better Jobs Act, is an investment in better jobs for home care workers, better care for seniors and people with disabilities, and better support for family caregivers. More than 50 million family members provide help for their families every day of the week. This investment is about services. It's also about turning poverty jobs into family supporting jobs. It is about creating a workforce that is paid a living wage so that home care workers do not need to work 60 hours a week, 70 hours a week, 80 hours a week just to feed their families.

It is about creating a workforce that is professionalized and respected so that we can recruit and retain the workers to provide more of these critical services. This investment is how we begin to address the healthcare workforce shortages that we've spoken about to support American families. It's also about supporting family members who are often the unrecognized and unpaid caregivers, providing support every day to their loved ones. As we know, the overwhelming majority of people with disabilities and older adults want to live and remain in their homes. We need to ensure that families have a real choice when it comes to the supports and services that their loved ones need. So that's why, today, I will be also be introducing the HCBS Access Act, so that everyone eligible for Medicaid long-term care

services and supports will have the ability to choose home based care and remain in their communities without fear of being put on a long waiting list.

So, the Better Care Better Jobs Act, and the HCBS Access Act are complementary. The first one is an investment to create a robust HCBS provider infrastructure for the recruitment and the retention of workers. The second bill establishes a permanent funding stream to keep the infrastructure strong and make sure we're able to continue to pay direct care professionals at a rate that ensures qualified, reliable services and a qualified, reliable workforce into the future. The HCBS Access Act also creates real choice for individuals and families, to be able to choose between home care supports and institutional care. Taken together, these bills will re-vitalize the caregiving workforce and create sustained changes for Home and Community Based Services. We should pass these commonsense bills so families don't have to face difficult decisions about how to care for a loved one. We, as a Nation, must come together to address the needs of the workforce that will help us care for who need support. So, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the need to create and sustain a strong home care workforce. Now I turn to Ranking Member Braun for his opening remarks.