

U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY



CHAIRMAN Special Committee on Aging

Chairman Bob Casey's Opening Statement

“A Financially Secure Future: Building a Stronger Retirement System for All Americans” October 28, 2021

The Senate Special Committee on Aging will come to order. Today the Committee convenes to discuss a critically important issue to the American people, the state of retirement security in our country. We will include both information about and discussions about for whom this system works well and then, also as well, those who the system leaves behind. I think it is true of all of us, no matter where we live or what point of view we have, that we all hope that when we reach old age we will be able to enjoy a retirement on our own terms. But the reality is that millions of American families approach retirement with almost nothing saved. Despite working too hard their whole lives, too many seniors are barely able to make ends meet. In 2020, for example, one-fourth of adults who had not yet retired did not have any--any--retirement savings. One-fourth of adults. Many others have managed to save only a fraction of what they will need and the truth is that our retirement system does very well for some but it allows millions of Americans to fall through the cracks. Some workers do not have access to retirement plans because their employers do not offer it. For example, in my home state of Pennsylvania, 44 percent of workers aged 18 to 64 in the private sector work for businesses that do not offer a retirement plan. 44 percent. In my home state, that amounts to about 2.2 million Pennsylvanians. Others face student loan debt or job changes or caregiving responsibilities that disrupt their ability to save for retirement. In 2019, I was proud to vote for the SECURE Act to help close some of these retirement gaps and expand financial security for hard-working Americans. This

year, Congress is considering many bipartisan proposals to build upon the SECURE Act and expand access to retirement plans, including auto enrolling workers and making it easier to carry a retirement plan with you when you change jobs. So as we consider these proposals, let us not forget about continuing to both protect and strengthen Social Security, which is the bedrock of our retirement system. Social Security is the most common source of income for most retirees and provides critical protections against poverty for older Americans. We must also consider the foundational issues that prevent people from saving for retirement in the first place. Here is one example from my home region of Northeastern Pennsylvania. Sophia Samuel of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, who faced the difficult choice that millions across our Nation are forced to confront. Sophia built a successful career as a professor, but her professional success coincided with a decline in her parents' health. As her parents battled cancer and other chronic health conditions, Sophia made a very tough choice. And that choice was to leave her job. She accepted work with a home care agency where she would be able to be paid to provide care for her parents. But here is the problem, despite that act of love by Sophia for her parents, that came with a reduction in pay. Her salary went from \$80,000 as a professor to just \$22,000 as a caregiver. And unfortunately, Sophia is not alone. Millions of Americans face choices like this. Millions of these family caregivers, mostly women, endure financial shocks like these, undermining their ability to save and plan for the future. So that is why legislation like my Better Care Better Jobs Act is critical. This bill would raise wages for home care workers while allowing them to save more for retirement. It would also help family caregivers like Sophia. It would give them options that they do not have right now, so they do not have to leave their jobs. And it would also allow them, of course, to continue to contribute to their retirement plans. Among other policies Democrats are working on, this policy would expand support for family

caregivers as part of the Build Back Better budget and we are working to help at the same time, in a larger sense, help American families build economic security in their working life and into retirement. So I look forward to our witnesses' testimony today and the wisdom that they bring to us, the ideas they are sharing. And with that, I would yield to the Ranking Member, Senator Scott.