

U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY



RANKING MEMBER *Special Committee on Aging*

**Sen. Casey's Opening Statement
The COVID-19 Pandemic and Seniors: A Look at Racial Health Disparities
July 21, 2020**

OPENING STATEMENT

“Thank you, Chairman Collins, for convening this hearing.

“As we you noted, as we begin this important work period in the Senate we mourn the passing of United States Representative John Lewis. Congressman Lewis was a brave Freedom Rider, he was a giant in the civil rights movement, who literally shed blood for the right to vote. Of course we know that he served in the U.S. House of Representatives for over 33 years. His life was a testament to the cause of justice.

“Now, as members of Congress, in the wake of his passing, we must ask ourselves at least one major question: What must we do to fulfill our obligation to further that cause? The cause of justice, especially as it relates to the challenges we face right now.

“Our witnesses today will help us answer that basic question. They will offer solutions, amid the pandemic and for the future, to bring about health equity for older Americans of color.

“Older Americans of color, as the Chairman outlined, have spent a life time enduring the structural inequities of racism that has plagued our country since its inception. We must own up to that simple and shameful truth.

“And we must not only acknowledge this injustices but we are summoned by the example of Rep. John Lewis to take action, to do something about it as he so often urged us to do throughout his life.

“What are those injustices, let me just name a few, but they are searing in their impact.

“The injustice of a lack of affordable housing. Based on Census data from 2015, 46 percent of Black households spent more than a third of their income on rent compared to 33 percent of white households.

“The injustice of food insecurity. Right now, Black and Hispanic households with children are twice as likely to struggle with food insecurity as white households.

“The injustice of the education gap. According to the Census, 40 percent of white individuals have a college degree or higher, compared to just 26 percent of Blacks and 18 percent of Hispanics.

“The injustice of unemployment itself. In June, the unemployment rate for Black Americans was 15.4 percent, compared to 10.1 percent for white Americans – a gap that is not unique, as we know, to the current crisis.

“And we have been reminded so horrifically lately, the injustice of police misconduct against Black Americans.

“It is no wonder that older adults of color are diagnosed with COVID-19 at higher rates than Whites and dying from COVID-19 at higher rates than whites.

“The New York Times recently reported on data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that Hispanic and Black individuals have been three times as likely to become infected with the virus, and twice as likely to die, as their white neighbors, a gap that only widens with age.

“A New York Times analysis of nursing home data from 22 states found that facilities serving significant numbers of Black and Hispanic residents were twice as likely to have COVID-19 infections, even after controlling for facility size, location, and quality rating.

“We have a chance – right now, in the next three weeks, to begin to address these injustices. And we hope to put ourselves on the road to actually correcting these injustices and thereby advancing the cause of justice for communities of color all across America, including older Americans, the focus of this hearing.

“Now we have been told that the Senate will finally consider additionally legislation to respond to the ongoing threat of COVID-19. Here is what we need to do in the near term. This is just in the near term, the next couple weeks and months.

“Number one, we need a national testing strategy. Number two we need more funding for personal protective equipment. Number three, we need a specific plan to keep nursing home residents and workers safe, and the dollars to make it work so that we don’t have another 57,000 Americans dead in nursing homes. Number four we need an expansion of long-term services and supports in the community. Number five we need pandemic premium pay for the heroes on the front lines who are helping to care for our aging loved ones. Number six we need a guarantee to quality affordable health care.

“There is more I can say but we must do all of these, all of these, and more to protect older Americans of color from the worst public health crisis in a century. However, the action we take in the short run are not a substitute for enacting policies to address the injustices that have plagued communities of color in this country for generations, not decades, generations.

“Taking action on these racial health disparities that we are here to talk about today is what the cause of justice demands of us in the United States Senate.

“Again, thank you, Chairman Collins, for convening this hearing today, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.”

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