



STATEMENT OF ANTHONY JACKSON
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Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Anthony Jackson and I am the Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Roper St. Francis Healthcare in Charleston, South Carolina. Roper St. Francis is the only private, not-for-profit, faith-based health care system in Charleston. We have four hospitals with 657 beds across five counties. We are the region's largest private employer with 6,000 employees, and we have more than 1,000 doctors on our medical staff.

The impact of COVID-19 on Roper St. Francis Healthcare has been dramatic. Since the start of 2020, there have been 455,495 confirmed cases of COVID in South Carolina. This pandemic has disproportionately affected older Americans, and that was especially true at Roper St. Francis Healthcare. Over the past year, we experienced many difficult moments as our doctors and nurses worked bravely and tirelessly to treat COVID patients. This includes patients such as Lethia Moore, a 78-year-old great-great-grandmother who was admitted to Roper St. Francis Healthcare on April 3, and sadly passed away on April 12, comforted by a nurse who refused to leave her side.

As COVID continued to spread, our hospital system adapted. While we already had a platform in place for telehealth, the COVID pandemic required us to scale up quickly. Telehealth has proven so valuable that we intend to continue it in the long run. We have set a goal of maintaining 20 percent of all visits via telehealth, which opens doors for many vulnerable older Americans, particularly those who are homebound, those living with disabilities, and those who live in rural areas.

We're hopeful that this pandemic will be brought to an end this year with the advent of the COVID-19 vaccine. Roper St. Francis Healthcare is working closely with the State of South Carolina to administer COVID vaccinations. We received our first batch of vaccine in December and began administering them to our health care workers on December 15. In January, we opened a COVID vaccination drive-thru for patients in the parking lot of the North Charleston Coliseum, a site that is used to accommodate crowds of more than 13,000 for events. We have the capacity to vaccinate up to 1,500 residents per day.

Additionally, this week, we launched a pop-up drive thru location in Berkeley County for residents 55 and older. This is important because about three-quarters of Berkeley County's 65 and older population has yet to be vaccinated. Vaccine drive-thru centers can play an integral role in expanding our vaccination campaign beyond urban areas to reach a population that is often left behind. Communities and states must be proactive and creative to reach residents who cannot get vaccinated through more traditional visits to hospitals and doctors' offices, and our drive-thru vaccination site would be a great model for others to follow.

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The pandemic and vaccine rollout also have shown the importance of treating seniors across all facets of the health care system. Whether its hospitals, community health centers, or nursing homes, we all have a role to play. Why? Because we know that when we consider social environmental factors such as social mobility, work, retirement, education, income, and wealth, caring for our seniors becomes even more complex. Healthcare for seniors is dynamic and multidimensional; and to address them adequately, the pandemic has taught us that care in the community has to be collaborative, innovative, intentional and equitable. Roper St. Francis is proud of the thousands of hours of community care that we provide in Charleston and the surrounding counties alongside our community partners and volunteers.

As a former licensed nursing home provider, I understand the value of senior-care communities. Our patients have turned to us for guidance over the past year, and we cannot lose this trust. We need to continue to have transparency and accountability, and I am proud of the work that all the staff at Roper St. Francis has done and will continue to do as the pandemic is not over. Ensuring healthcare providers have a sufficient and dependable supply of COVID-19 vaccine is central to our ability to successfully plan and operate vaccination events, so thank you for your continued efforts on this issue. I am thankful to every member of the committee for their work to ensure that our hospitals had the resources they needed to fight the pandemic, and I'm looking forward to continuing to serve our patients in the Lowcountry.