



**Chairman Bob Casey’s Opening Statement**  
**"Frauds, Scams and COVID-19: How Con Artists Have Targeted Older Americans During**  
**the Pandemic"**  
**September 23, 2021**

Good morning everyone, the Senate Special Committee on Aging will come to order.

Today, the Committee convenes a hearing to learn about how COVID-19 left older Americans more vulnerable to frauds and scams. In the early days of the pandemic, many seniors isolated themselves in an effort to avoid contracting the virus, but in the process were cut off from family and friends. Fraudsters saw an opportunity and they pounced. They preyed on the fear and uncertainty surrounding the disease, as well as the loneliness and isolation that resulted from the pandemic. People were longing for human contact, and a friendly voice on the phone or a beckoning message on Facebook that became harder to turn away from, all of that. At the same time, without regular contact without friends and families, it was easier for small scams to balloon into big scams.

Still, today, eighteen months into the pandemic, federal agencies, state governments and advocates warn of con artists who will do all of the following: number one, peddle fake cures for the coronavirus, number two, charge outrageous prices for protective equipment and third, seek to steal stimulus checks and unemployment benefits. These types of scenarios, which are exacerbated by the pandemic, are not hypothetical. Today, the Committee will hear testimony from Kate Kleinert. Kate’s a resident of Glenolden,

Pennsylvania in Delaware county, southeastern Pennsylvania. Last year, Kate survived a scam in which a con artist defrauded her of tens of thousands of dollars. I want to thank Kate for being with us today, I'll introduce her later more formally. But also I want to say to Kate and to so many others, who come to Congress to testify about something that has happened to them personally, that is an act of courage and sharing her story will help others. The Federal Trade Commission's data shows that Kate was not alone in the experience she endured. A theme we will hear from Kate and our other witnesses today is the importance of education in stopping frauds and scams before they start.

Stories like Kate's are why I reintroduced the bipartisan Stop Senior Scams Act with Senator Moran, that's bill S. 337. I want to thank Ranking Member Scott for co-sponsoring the bill and others who were working with us. This bill would create an Advisory Committee to ensure banks and other businesses have the information and tools they need to train employees to spot and speak up about possible senior scams. I was also pleased that the American Rescue Plan, passed by Democrats in March of this year, included funding for the Elder Justice Act to support programs to combat elder abuse, enhance Adult Protective Services, and more. This is one of many services that serve as front-line defenses against elder financial exploitation and abuse. In addition, the Aging Committee's annual fraud book, here's the book I'm referring to, this is this year's edition. This provides tips on how older Americans can avoid being scammed. This fraud book also provides lists of consumer watchdogs and law enforcement agencies that can help people who believe they or someone they love may have been scammed.

Starting today, this 2021 Fraud Book will be available for download on the Aging Committee's website at Aging DOT Senate DOT G-O-V. In 2013, the Aging Committee started its toll-free fraud hotline, with the goal of making it easier for seniors to report fraud and to seek assistance. Since that time, since 2013, the Committee has received thousands of calls. The hope is that the hotline provides the caller with helpful advice, but it also helps the Committee keep a pulse on the types of threats that older Americans are facing. For people listening at home, the fraud hotline's toll-free number is: 1-855-303-9470. I'll say that again, 1-855-303-9470. The hotline would not be possible without the efforts of frontline staff receiving these calls and providing advice, which is hard and often heartbreaking work.

To that end, I'd like to thank Jose and Jasmine on my staff for their efforts to keep the fraud hotline up and running. This is the first time that Ranking Member Scott and I have released the fraud book together, and I think I can say on his behalf, that we are proud to do that and proud to join those who have worked on this committee for many years. One final point, today's hearing will include Senators participating both virtually and in-person. I guess this is the second time we've done that. We also have votes coming up, so we're hoping to get through at least opening statements by witnesses after Ranking Member Scott's statement. Then we will see where we are with voting and determine whether we should take a brief recess so we can vote and come back to continue the hearing. I want to thank our witnesses and others who made this hearing possible. With that, I yield and turn to our Ranking Member, Senator Tim Scott.