

## Opening Statement of Chairman Sen. Bill Nelson

*Senate Special Committee on Aging: Aging in Comfort: Assessing the Special Needs of America's Holocaust Survivors*  
January 15, 2014

Good afternoon everyone, and thank you for being here today as we discuss a very important issue: caring for America's Holocaust survivors.

It is difficult to know the exact number of Holocaust survivors in the United States today- because many of our survivors do not want to talk about the unspeakable horror they endured to even their own family members.

But according to some estimates, the number of survivors now range anywhere from 109,000 to upwards of 150,000.

One thing is certain: This population has survived an unspeakable horror, a trauma not comparable to any other.

Many Holocaust survivors face lasting health problems as a result of long periods of psychological abuse, upheaval, malnutrition, direct physical assault, and exposure to severe weather conditions with minimal clothing and footwear.

In women, for instance, the incidence of osteoporosis is significantly higher among Holocaust survivors due to malnutrition, lack of exercise and sunlight, and forced labor at a young age in the camps.

Furthermore, a November 2009 National Cancer Institute study found that Holocaust survivors were at a higher risk for cancer occurrence later in life.

Above all, the post-traumatic stress suffered by Holocaust survivors is exacerbated by the normal aging process; for many Holocaust survivors, the normal feelings of anxiety triggered by the natural process of aging and reflecting on one's life reactivate long-buried symptoms of trauma.

These complex dynamics require a different approach to traditional long-term care models. The emphasis on caring for aging survivors must be on creating a safe space surrounded by a trusting caretaker, familiar environment, and a basic sense of control over daily life.

For many of these seniors, this means staying in their homes to receive medical care in their twilight years, a model of care not supported by the traditional Medicaid model, for instance.

I am proud that the United States has a legacy of caring for the needs of aging Holocaust survivors. But, we must recognize that the demand for care is still there – and only becoming more challenging.

Today we will examine the unique needs of Holocaust survivors in the U.S., what services are available to them, and what gaps in services need to be filled in order to meet their needs.

I want to extend a special thank you to Mr. Jack Rubin and his son, David, who have traveled here from Florida to discuss this important issue. Jack is a Holocaust survivor and a constituent of mine, and it's a pleasure to welcome you back to Washington.

I look forward to hearing from our other witnesses, as well.

America's Holocaust survivors deserve not only the best care as they get older, but the right kind of care that is respectful of the experience they have endured. It is our obligation to at least do everything we can, for as long as we can.