



Chairman Bob Casey's Opening Statement
"A Changing Workforce: Supporting Older Workers Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond"
April 29, 2021

The Senate Special Committee on Aging will come to order. Good morning everyone. The hearing we are having today comes at a critical time, as Congress discusses how to get American workers back on their feet and pull our economy out of the ditch. Over the last year, workers in every occupation and in every corner of the country felt the effects of the devastating economic recession created by COVID-19. Let's get this microphone up. Sorry about that.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has been devastating to every corner of the country, and especially to workers. While the harm has not been contained to any one age group, the effects felt by older workers have been severe. As we all know, the threat posed by the virus is magnified for older adults, as individuals ages 50 and over have accounted for 95 percent of all deaths. 95 percent of all deaths. Millions of older workers have had to make the impossible choice between continuing to go to work to pay their bills or staying home to protect their health and protect their families. Many others simply saw their jobs disappear.

For example In Pennsylvania, the 12-month rolling average unemployment rate of workers ages 55 and older increased, increased all the way from 3.0 percent in February

2020 to 9.2 percent in February 2021. While the unemployment rate has declined since last summer, 1.7 million workers ages 55 and older are still unemployed nationwide. As we will hear from our witnesses today, unemployment numbers don't tell the whole story. Hundreds of thousands of older workers fell out of the work force altogether, giving up on finding a job or being forced to retire early.

Fortunately, we are beginning to see the light at the end of this very dark tunnel. The American Rescue Plan contained critical investments to defeat the virus and help families including, just by way of example: An extension of expanded unemployment benefits and \$1,400 direct payment. Funding to help ensure employers are keeping workers safe and healthy in the workplace. And third, A historic investment in vaccine distribution. All of these are critical to helping older workers return to work safely. The American Rescue Plan was a huge step forward, because there is still much more we need to do, to quote 3 "build back better" as President Biden has said. I believe we need to pass the President Biden's American Jobs Plan to make investments in our nation's infrastructure that are long overdue.

The investments in the Americans Job Plan will create millions of middle-class jobs, raise wages and help workers develop the skills that will power economic growth for years to come. Older workers would benefit enormously from this investment. As older workers are looking to return to work safely, it is also more important than ever that Congress dismantle barriers, the barriers that have long made it more difficult for them to succeed in the workplace. One of the most significant of these barriers is age discrimination. That is why I reintroduced my bipartisan Protecting Older Workers Against Discrimination Act, S.880, along with Senators Grassley, Leahy and Collins. This bipartisan bill would

strengthen age discrimination protections and make it easier for older workers to seek justice in court.

In addition to that, another bipartisan bill I was proud to introduce yesterday with the Ranking Member, Senator Portman and Senator Cortez Masto. It is our Senior Care Act. Which will allow 4 seniors with disabilities to work while keeping essential Medicaid benefits. And today Ranking Member Scott and I are also sending a letter to the Department of Labor calling on the Department to specifically address the needs of older workers as our nation recovers from the Pandemic.

As we build a better economy we must work together to ensure that older workers are included and prioritized every step of the way. So I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about these policies and others that will help guarantee that older workers help us lead the way to a stronger future. Before we begin I want to remind Committee Members and witnesses to please keep their remarks and questions to five minutes. The countdown timer can be viewed alongside the other participant windows on Webex, as you can see. Following opening remarks, Senators will ask their questions based on seniority, and I ask that Members have their cameras turned on a few minutes prior to their questions. Ranking Member Scott, I am pleased to turn it over to you for your opening remarks.