Statement of Ranking Member Tom Carper
"Connecting Patients to New and Potential Life Saving Treatments"
Thursday, February 25, 2016

As prepared for delivery:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this hearing today. I appreciate your willingness to open a conversation about this issue that I know is a very critical one to Americans seeking access to potentially lifesaving treatments and new medical innovations for themselves or members of their family.

I also want to thank our witnesses, especially Ms. Laura McLinn, Mr. Diego Morris, and Ms. Nancy Goodman, for their thoughtful and insightful testimony, and especially for their willingness to share their personal stories with us.

Today, we will hear from patients, their loved ones, and others on potential opportunities to improve access to medical breakthroughs and life-saving medical treatments. These individuals and their families have faced some of the most difficult and challenging circumstances and decisions anyone could face. They deserve our compassion and our understanding.

Speaking as a father, husband, brother, and son, it's important that we learn from our witnesses experiences so that we in Congress can work together with the Executive Branch, patient groups, industry, and other stakeholders to ensure that all Americans can gain access to safe and effective lifesaving treatments as quickly as possible.

Simply put, the development of new medicines is a long, complex, and risky process. For individuals with life-threatening conditions and their loved ones, safe and effective treatments cannot come quickly enough.

As we will hear from some of our witnesses today, the path for patients and their physicians to access innovative new treatments may not be clear. Reforms may be needed to make sure that patients and their families and doctors have the information they need to explore potential new treatment options.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which is charged with ensuring that the drugs available to American consumers are safe and effective, has given an extraordinary level of attention to the requests of patients with life-threatening conditions. In fact, they've approved more than 99 percent of requests for emergency treatments.

Despite these high approval rates, I understand that the FDA believes more can be done and is continuing to work to improve patient access to these experimental medical treatments.

I hope we can help with those efforts and continue to work closely with patients, health care providers, the pharmaceutical industry, and the FDA to ensure that all patients and their families can access safe and reliable treatments as quickly as possible.

I want to close by thanking the witnesses and their families again for their willingness to share their stories and put forward possible solutions to these challenging issues.