

PSI Hearing, May 21, 2025 – “The Corruption of Science and Federal Health Agencies: How Health Officials Downplayed and Hid Myocarditis and Other Adverse Events Associated with the COVID-19 Vaccines”

The Opening Statement of Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal:

Sen. Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for having this first hearing of our Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. I think we all agree that this hearing and our efforts in this Subcommittee ought to be nonpartisan and nonpolitical, and that we should de-politicize science, strictly adhere to the evidence, medical evidence, without ideological predilection. And that there ought to be warnings about side effects from any medicine, and that the warning should be as prompt as possible. I think we should all agree on that fact. And there ought to be a very rigorous review of any kind of medical treatment by the FDA, to make sure it is safe and effective before it's used in the public. But I want to take us back to January 2021. I know it's hard to recall the sense of real fear during the worst of the pandemic, more than 20,000 Americans died from coronavirus each week. I remember seeing pictures of people who were in the hospital on gurneys because there was inadequate space for them in the hospital. The morgues overflowed, and we were looking to some way to stop the spread and the deep-seeded pervasive fear.

During the worst of the pandemic, more than 25,000 Americans died. That was during the last week of President Trump's term of office. Not only were hospitals overwhelmed, but nonurgent procedures were postponed, and doctors and nurses were working around the clock, in fact putting themselves at risk. Those health care providers to this day are among my heroes, as patients filled the hallways. As we talk about the side effects of COVID vaccines, I think we need to be clear about the most important fact. For all Americans, COVID-19 vaccines have saved millions and millions of lives. There is no scientific question about that fact. It saves lives. In the past five years, more than 1.2 million Americans have lost their lives to COVID-19. That is 1.2 million parents, children, friends, and loved ones, and we all know someone who has perished as a result of COVID-19. But when the vaccine became widely available in 2021, deaths sharply declined, and many lives have been saved in the years since. Many in this room, speaking for myself as well as others, probably have been saved from this disease because of those vaccines. One study found that 3 million American deaths were averted. 18 million hospitalizations were avoided, and \$1 trillion in health care costs were saved in the United States in just the first two years after COVID vaccines were distributed.

I would like this study entered into the record, Mr. Chairman if there's no objection. *Chairman Johnson:* Without objection. *Sen. Blumenthal:* Now, vaccines not only saved American lives, they allowed us to get back on our feet economically. They enabled the American economy to recover. Let's try to think of where we were five years ago, with a deadly, unknown virus spreading through America and through the world. We were only able to come so far because of the vaccines, and the researchers who develop them and the public health officials who distributed them. And now those individuals are again under attack, our public officials.

I looked at those documents, maybe not all of them, that the Majority alleges show that the Biden administration or those public health officials suppressed evidence of side effects. Let's be clear, the allegation is that they purposely concealed evidence. I am unable to support that conclusion with this evidence. In fact, the primary piece of evidence for this claim is that the CDC did not issue any notice on its health alert network, HAN, in May 2021, while it was still analyzing the evidence about myocarditis. We are talking about myocarditis, the Chairman has referenced other side effects, I'm not sure what he means. But what I see, as I look at that evidence, is public health officials wrestling with what to do, and what kind of warning to issue. And, again, side effects must be studied and communicated, and that's what I see happening in these documents that the Majority has released.

So we have to distinguish, I think, between differences of opinion under the pressure of a pandemic and separate the opinions of scientists, who are working for the greater good, and, frankly, others who may simply be seeking to sow distrust, while they profit off misinformation and fear. And I am, frankly,

deeply concerned about some of today's witnesses, because they have a financial interest in fomenting distrust of COVID-19 vaccines and pushing untested alternative remedies over proven treatments. In fact, two of today's witnesses are executives at something called the Wellness Company, which sells the disproven treatment, ivermectin, and a host of untested supplements, which include something called "Ultimate Spike Detox," that cost \$89.99 a bottle. Another makes money from suing vaccine companies, and still others are pushing unsupported research while rejecting the proven scientists on COVID and other vaccines.

Let's be very clear that fear mongering and rushing to conclusions without examining the evidence can lead to tremendous harm, and this risk is not just hypothetical or rhetorical. Misinformation about the safety of vaccines has led to a deadly outbreak of a preventable disease, we all know it, measles. Just twenty-five years ago, measles was declared eliminated in the United States. Since then, conspiracy theories, some financially motivated, have caused vaccination rates to plummet. Last September, the CDC warned that declining childhood vaccinations could lead to a resurgence of a preventable disease like measles and rotavirus, exactly what is happening today. As of today, more than 1000 Americans have been diagnosed with measles this year, in 31 states, many of them children, so far three have died. These deaths were preventable. They could have been avoided, but for the efforts of misinformation proponents that have spread lies and created fears. There has been so much misinformation and fear since COVID-19 emerged that during the height of the pandemic, health care workers and public health officials were often harassed and threatened, some of them continue to fear for their lives.

During the first frightening year of the pandemic, the Trump administration withheld critical information from the public, made baseless promises that the virus will magically disappear. I'm quoting the president, "magically disappear," engaged in unfounded conspiracy theories and sham science about COVID-19 treatment and sowed the seeds of distrust in public health institutions. And then to the tremendous credit of President Trump, he fast-tracked the vaccines. Let me repeat, to the credit of the Trump administration, the President of the United States fast-track the vaccine and saved lives.

We need to learn from history. We are seeing the same pattern now. Those same seeds of doubt and distrust have been nurtured by the President's choices for key positions in this administration, including the decision to install a well-known vaccines skeptic as the head of HHS and to fill our public health agencies with conspiracists. And, let's bring it right to the present day. Just yesterday, it was announced that the FDA may start restricting access to new COVID boosters, to those over 65, or with a narrow set of pre-existing conditions. Now, we ought to be very frank here. Discerning what exactly this new guidance may be at the moment is confusing. And the troubling news leaves many questions unanswered about whether and how people can actually access vaccines, if they want to do so. Will Americans who live with elderly or immunocompromised relatives, for example, have access to these vaccines? We don't know. And so far, those questions are unanswered. The manner and timing of this decision, frankly, reek of politics, not science. And, again, science ought to be the lone star.

So, I think we need to be looking at the present. We need to be looking forward. In the first four months since the President took office, he and his health secretary have fired at least 10,000 employees from public health agencies and cut more than \$2.7 billion in funding for research, including \$4.2 million for vaccine clinical trials. Let me repeat, clinical trials, money cut to do them. How does that make us safer? More than \$3.8 million for safety monitoring, and more than \$2 billion for state immunization programs, a drastic cut that is already hampering our measles response. These reckless cuts are undermining our ability to respond, not just the measles, but to what may come next. And we all know, something will come next. That is the history. We need to learn from history and science.

Let me just finish by saying the capacity of our agencies to warn is compromised by these cuts. The capacity of our agencies to do science and rely on science is compromised when we cut 10,000 people from the ranks of the agencies responsible for safety. And so, I welcome the interest in this topic. I'm honored that the governor of Hawai'i, Dr. Josh Green, has joined us today, to share his experiences addressing both measles and COVID-19. He is not only a dedicated public servant, but he's also a

physician who led his experience in his state of Hawai'i during the pandemic, and I'm thankful to him for being here today. And I look forward to the testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.