

SERESE MAROTTA, WITNESS STATEMENT
U.S. Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
Hearing: Voices of the Vaccine Injured
July 15, 2025, 3:00pm ET

My name is Serese Marotta and I am a mother who lost my child to a vaccine-preventable disease. My professional background includes over 16 years as an environmental scientist conducting qualitative and quantitative human health and ecological risk assessments, and I currently work in public health.

In 2009, my five-year-old son, Joseph, was a healthy child who was attending kindergarten. He was a typical little boy who loved Star Wars and Spiderman. Some of our favorite things to do together was play board games and build puzzles. He was smart, funny, and inquisitive—simply put, he was one of the joys of my life.

I was a protective mother, and like other parents, I always tried my best to keep my children safe, healthy, and free from harm. I made sure they had nutritious meals, they wore their helmets while riding their bikes, and I held their hands when we crossed the street. For me, keeping my kids healthy also meant making sure they were vaccinated on time, every time. To be honest, the thought of losing a child to a vaccine-preventable disease never occurred to me. At the time, I incorrectly thought that these diseases were mostly a thing of the past—until I lost my son, Joseph, to flu during the H1N1 pandemic in October 2009. The monovalent H1N1 flu vaccine that could have saved Joseph's life was not available in our community until two weeks after he died.

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), upwards of 130,000 people died from flu during the 2024-2025 season. Joseph was one of 288 children that died during the 2009-2010 flu season, and one of over 2,700 children who have died from flu since 2004. Just this past flu season, over 250 children have died from flu, the highest number of pediatric flu deaths in a non-pandemic year since pediatric flu deaths became a nationally notifiable condition in 2004. And that's just flu.

Right now, because of declining immunization rates, we are seeing outbreaks of measles and pertussis. This year, we have witnessed three measles deaths—two of them children. The current number of U.S. measles cases is the highest we've seen in 33 years. We have witnessed a dramatic surge in whooping cough cases compared to previous years. Due to mis- and disinformation, lack of access, anti-science sentiment, and other factors, Americans are continuing to suffer and die from diseases we have the tools to prevent. Parents continue to bury their children. We need only to look to history to see what will happen if these trends continue.

There is no “acceptable loss” when it comes to children and vaccine-preventable diseases. Let me briefly share how my life has changed since losing Joseph. Let me share how incredibly devastating it was to watch my child die in front of me in an ICU room. Let me share how incredibly hard it was to go home that morning and tell his 7-year-old sister that her little brother wasn’t ever coming home. Let me share what it felt like to walk into the funeral home holding my daughter’s hand and preparing her to see her brother laying in a small coffin. Let me share how agonizing it was to sit in my dead son’s room, amongst his toys and clothes, and realize that I would never again read him a bedtime story. Let me share how unbearable it was to stand in a line at the county clinic to get my daughter her monovalent H1N1 vaccine that became available just two weeks after my son died—a vaccine that could possibly have saved his life. Let me share how incredibly painful it has been for my family each and every day to remember that Joseph is never going to graduate college, never going to get married, never going to have a chance to contribute to society.

Let me share how my heart breaks over and over and over again because he is no longer here. Now multiply that by THOUSANDS of other parents who have lost a child to a vaccine-preventable disease over the years and the THOUSANDS MORE that are at risk if people don’t have access to science-based, factual information about vaccines, vaccine safety, and vaccination services.

Sadly, Joseph’s story is not unique. I personally know many other parents who lost children to vaccine-preventable diseases. Maurine lost her two-year-old son, JJ, to flu. Katie lost her infant daughter, Callie, to whooping cough. Patti lost her 17-year-old daughter, Kimberly, to meningitis B. Nicole lost her ten-year-old daughter, Teresa, to COVID-19. There are survivors, too, like Tamika who had cervical cancer before the HPV vaccine was available and had to have a radical hysterectomy as part of her treatment, leaving her unable to have biological children. The list goes on. These families are just a handful of examples of the real impacts of vaccine-preventable diseases.

Almost 10,000 babies are born each day in the U.S. Each of them are vulnerable to deadly infectious diseases. It’s both my personal and professional mission and the mission of Vaccinate Your Family, where I work, to ensure that no more families are left to grieve the loss of a loved one from a vaccine-preventable disease. The best way to prevent these losses is with timely, routine immunizations across the lifespan. Vaccines help us lead healthy lives. Vaccines go through extensive safety testing in clinical trials before they are approved for use, and the U.S. has robust safety monitoring systems to make sure these vaccines continue to be safe and effective following approval. These systems are critical because we have to ensure that vaccines remain safe and effective.

According to the CDC, about 4 million deaths worldwide are prevented by childhood vaccinations every year. And more than 50 million deaths can be prevented through immunization between 2021 and 2030. That's a huge number of parents across the globe that could be spared the loss of their child if routine vaccinations continue to be a public health priority.

I want to close by acknowledging that my story and experiences do not in any way minimize those of my fellow witnesses. We are all doing the best we can with the information we have. But I would be remiss if I did not remind the Committee that the science is clear: vaccines are safe and effective. Without these lifesaving tools, our families and communities are at risk.



Joseph Marotta, Age 5
Photo Credit: Serese Marotta

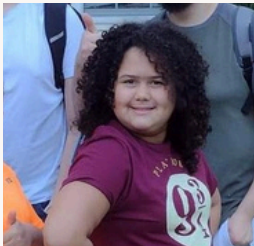
THE REAL IMPACT OF Vaccine-Preventable Diseases

Ian



At six months old, Ian was a picture of health and laughed all the time. Sadly, he **died from complications of influenza (flu)**, just 30 hours after showing his first symptom.

Teresa



Teresa was a healthy, artistic 10-year-old who loved being a Girl Scout. She wasn't high risk for COVID, but **lost her life during the pandemic** before vaccines were approved for her age group.

Tamika



Tamika's life was forever changed when she was **diagnosed with cervical cancer** in her 20s. After chemotherapy and radiation, she underwent a radical hysterectomy to save her life.

Joshua



Joshua didn't know that he **wasn't vaccinated against measles** until he began experiencing a high fever and rash. He **ended up in the hospital** and it took him months to recover.

Evan



Evan was a star college baseball player when he contracted deadly meningococcal meningitis. After being hospitalized and suffering numerous amputations, Evan **lost his life to meningitis**.