

## Testimony of Tamika Felder, Cervivor Founder and 25-Year Cervical Cancer Survivor

My name is Tamika Felder, a twenty-five-year survivor of cervical cancer. I stand before you today to speak to the safety and importance of vaccines for all people, to honor those we have lost to cervical cancer, and to advocate for the open and accurate sharing of scientific information so that families and communities can protect themselves and future generations.

I was diagnosed in 2001 at the age of 25 while working as a TV Producer in Washington, DC. The disease forced me to confront the fragility of health, and I endured chemotherapy and radiation therapy, which ultimately led to the loss of my fertility. Today, as a survivor and a patient advocate, I have dedicated my work to education, empowerment, and ensuring that every person has access to accurate medical information, trusted health care, and life-saving prevention tools. I also firmly believe that the HPV vaccine, which would have offered protection against the HPV types most commonly associated with cervical cancer, could have changed the trajectory of my life.

The human cost of cervical cancer remains a preventable disease for most people when prevention and screening are accessible and effectively utilized. Too many lives are cut short by this disease. I want to recognize, honor, and mourn the individuals whose lives were lost to cervical cancer, including Teolita Rickenbacker, Erica Fraizer Stum, and Becky Wallace.

Each of these women was more than a diagnosis; they were mothers, sisters, friends, and contributors to their communities. Their stories remind us why prevention, vaccination where appropriate, and continued research are essential to save others from needless suffering and loss.

While other countries are nearing cervical cancer elimination, the United States is still behind, despite having all the tools needed for elimination.

Vaccines approved for use in the United States undergo rigorous, multi-phase testing for safety and efficacy before they are licensed by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and monitored continuously after approval by the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) and other post-marketing surveillance systems.

The overwhelming majority of vaccines have favorable safety profiles, and the benefits—reduction of infectious disease, prevention of severe illness and death, and protection of vulnerable populations—greatly outweigh the risks of rare adverse events.

Health authorities, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Physicians, and the World Health Organization, repeatedly reaffirm that vaccines are one of the most effective tools in safeguarding public health. When safety signals are detected, they are investigated promptly with rigorous methods. Recommendations can change or be refined as science advances, but the core evidence base consistently supports vaccines as safe and necessary for individual and community protection.

Vaccines are not just about one disease; they are about a standard approach to preventing contagious and deadly illnesses. The safety frameworks apply to vaccines across the board: routine immunizations for children, adults, and special populations; cancer-prevention vaccines like the HPV vaccine; influenza vaccines; and vaccines for other preventable diseases.

The HPV vaccine, in particular, has an important, specific track record. It has been available for approximately two decades (the vaccine was introduced in the mid-2000s). Accumulated data from hundreds of millions of doses administered globally show that the vaccine is highly effective at reducing infection with HPV types responsible for the vast majority of cervical cancers and other HPV-related cancers. The safety profile of the HPV vaccine has remained reassuring across diverse populations and age groups, with serious adverse events being exceedingly rare and generally unrelated to the vaccine when carefully evaluated.

It is crucial to highlight that vaccination does not remove the need for screening. Regular cervical cancer screening (e.g., Pap tests and HPV testing) remains essential, as early detection saves lives and reduces the likelihood of cancer progression, even as vaccination reduces risk.

Science provides the best-available evidence about the safety and effectiveness of vaccines. Relying on rigorous research, transparent reporting, and peer-reviewed findings is essential to protect public health. In an era of rapid information exchange, we must commit to sharing factual, science-based information. Misinformation and fear-mongering about vaccines undermine trust, delay or prevent vaccination, and leave people vulnerable to preventable disease. Public health communication should be clear, compassionate, and inclusive. It should acknowledge concerns, provide transparent explanations of benefits and risks, and connect people with trusted healthcare providers who can answer questions and offer individualized guidance.

Survivors and patients must be at the center of conversations about vaccines and cancer prevention. We bring lived experience with disease, treatment, and survivorship—perspective that

matters when designing education, outreach, and clinical guidance.

Policies should ensure equitable access to vaccines, screening, and prevention services, including culturally competent education, language access, and accessible care for people with disabilities. Schools, workplaces, and community organizations should have clear resources to share accurate information, address questions, and direct individuals to trusted healthcare providers.

As a cervical cancer survivor and advocate, I have seen both the devastating toll of cancer and the profound promise of prevention. Vaccines, including the HPV vaccine, are powerful tools that, when used alongside screening and treatment, significantly reduce the burden of cancer and save lives. We must continue to share science-based information openly, support rigorous safety monitoring, and ensure that every person has the opportunity to protect themselves and their families. The stories of Teolita Rickenbacker, Erica Fraizer Stum, Becky Wallace, and countless others remind us why this work matters: prevention saves lives, and accurate information saves lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am grateful for your consideration of policies that protect communities today and for generations to come.

Respectfully, Tamika Felder Founder, 25-year Cervical cancer survivor