

Opening Statement

As Prepared for Delivery

Over this past year, we have witnessed history with the development of the COVID-19 vaccine. As we will hear from our witnesses today, vaccines are safe and effective tools that have been proven to protect Americans from preventable, life-threatening diseases. However, vaccines are only effective if people receive them, which is why I am grateful we are holding a hearing today on legislation which addresses barriers to vaccine access.

One of the largest barriers to vaccinations is hesitancy. In my nearly three decades of medical practice prior to serving in Congress, I witnessed vaccine hesitancy firsthand. I would see college students opt not to receive the measles vaccination prior to a mission trip and return from Mexico sick with measles. The best medicine we have is preventive medicine, and vaccines are one of, if not the most powerful preventive tools in our toolbox.

While the bills being discussed today are intended to break these barriers, I do question the necessity of some given the significant funding included in COVID response packages for this very purpose. With that being said, we have learned a great deal about vaccinations as we worked to immunize as many Americans as possible against COVID-19. Improvements must certainly be made to immunization infrastructure, vaccine confidence, and education. We have also learned a great deal about the importance of innovation, and how it saves lives too. That is why bills which increase support for public-private partnerships, like H.R. 3743, the Supporting the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health and the Reagan-Udall Foundation for the Food and Drug Administration Act, introduced by Rep. Hudson and Rep. Eshoo, are so important.

Addressing barriers to immunizations is not a partisan issue. We have all witnessed the lives saved by vaccines since December. More than just the COVID-19 vaccine, immunizations protect not only the

health of our own children, but the health of entire communities.

Parents who have babies too young to be vaccinated, or people who are too sick to receive vaccines count on others for high vaccinations rates.

Thank you, Madame Chair, for holding this important hearing today, and thank you to our witnesses for being here.