

Attachment—Additional Questions for the Record

**Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on
“Fanning the Flames: Disinformation and Extremism in the Media”
February 24, 2021**

Ms. Kristin Urquiza, Co-founder, Marked By COVID

The Honorable Yvette Clarke (D-NY)

1. Let me begin by giving my condolences to you and your family on the loss of your father. COVID-19 has now taken the lives of more than half a million Americans and we continue to mourn their loss.

There have been significant racial disparities in COVID-19 cases and death in communities nationwide. We are now seeing the dangers of misinformation manifest as vaccine hesitancy in communities of color, who are statistically more at risk of contracting the virus.

As you stated in your speech at the 2020 Democratic National Convention, your father’s “only preexisting condition was trusting Donald Trump.”

As we chart the path forward toward health and recovery, how can we begin to restore trust in elected officials for communities of color?

RESPONSE:

This is such an important question, Representative Clarke. Communities of color have been left behind in this pandemic. Not only have we suffered and lost the most, but we’re also still seeing communities of color left behind during the vaccination campaign.

Take for example how this pandemic has impacted my childhood neighborhood of Maryvale in Phoenix, Arizona where my Dad lived and my Mom still lives. When my Mom and Dad were sick with COVID in June 2020 people in this neighborhood of 70%+ Latino and 30%+ immigrants were waiting in lines for 13 hours to receive a COVID test. Right now that same neighborhood is seeing only a 14% vaccination rate versus the state rate of 40% (for one dose) and a whopping 77% vaccination rate in the affluent and white neighborhood of Scottsdale.

We’ve seen that we can address hesitancy by breaking down the barriers of access, education, and familiarity. When a person who is trusted has had the treatment and “lived to tell the tale” that helps erode away hesitancy. However, we haven’t broken down the barrier of access.

COVID has exposed so much that many of us have already known: that there are deep inequities in our society that are propped up by rules that favor the haves versus the have not. With our country headed in the direction of majority people of color in just a couple of decades, we must address these disparities now if we are to live up to our ideals as well as ensure our national security.

The way to build that trust is to start investing in these communities and leaders in these communities now, to listen to them, and to make sure they have real representation in the decisions that impact their lives. That means having groups like Marked By COVID, a victim and survivor's advocacy organization that I co-founded after losing my Dad, at the decision-making table. People need to see the government working for them, and then they can start to trust the government. In my childhood neighborhood of Maryvale, I'm not sure they have seen that the Biden Administration (or "government") is working for them. Under Trump, they couldn't get tested and under Biden, they aren't getting vaccinated.

This will take a significant investment from the government to meet people where they are at but it's an investment we can no longer afford not to make if we are truly going to be a nation that is governed for the people and by the people.