

OPENING STATEMENT
Nomination Hearing for Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D.
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee
June 8, 2021

Chairman Murray, Ranking Member Burr, and Members of the Committee, thank you for considering my nomination to be the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. And thank you to Senators Blumenthal and Murphy for your kind introductions. I so appreciate your leadership and fierce advocacy for mental health and substance use treatment and recovery needs of the people of Connecticut and across our nation.

It is a true honor to be here today. First, I want to thank President Biden for nominating me and placing his trust in me. Here with me today is my husband, Patrick Rittmon, a 22-year veteran of the United States Marine Corp. I am ever grateful for his service to our country and for his support and understanding throughout out my career.

I sit before you today the daughter of Haitian immigrants who came to the United States filled with hope and optimism of America's promise. My father, through perseverance, long hours and a passion for learning and helping others, became a psychiatrist and practiced for over 50 years achieving 5 board certifications in the mental health field. It is with this same passion for learning and aiding others that my parents raised my three brothers, two sisters and me emphasizing education, hard work, empathy, compassion, perseverance, with faith, through adversity and cherishing the blessing of our family. These are all values that are central to who I am today and core values that influence and inform my work.

Throughout my over 20-year career in the behavioral health field, I have had extensive experience in direct client care, academic, and government settings. Emphasizing recovery and addressing equity and culture in behavioral health service delivery and system development are prominent themes in my work – largely influenced by my having received a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Minority Fellowship in graduate school and my subsequent payback experiences with the Yale University Program for Recovery and

Community Health in Department of Psychiatry, where I conducted research, provided clinical care, training and consultation in community mental health and state government settings. I am currently an Adjunct Associate Professor at Yale having been on faculty since 2002 and am a testament to the value of such fellowship programs growing our diverse behavioral health workforce.

As the Commissioner of the Connecticut State Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, a role I have held since 2015, my focus has been on promoting recovery-oriented, integrated, and culturally responsive services and systems that foster dignity, respect, and meaningful community inclusion of the individuals we are entrusted to serve.

The President has nominated me at an inflection point of this nation's collective mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic has had far reaching ripple effects on many aspects of our daily lives and has taken a significant toll on mental health. Across the country we are seeing increased rates of anxiety and depression, and tragically overdose deaths are substantially increasing across the country.

As we face this behavioral health challenge of our lifetime, SAMHSA finds itself with never before seen resources to address these critical issues.

Where we go from here will define a generation of American families.

If confirmed, my agenda is clear – first, we must increase access to mental health and substance use services and supports to better address the behavioral health challenges adults and children alike are experiencing as a result of the pandemic.

Second, we must enhance crisis and suicide prevention services and supports in line with the implementation of the 988 national suicide prevention and crisis hotline. This nationwide change in crisis response will allow Americans in crisis to connect with support when and where they need it.

Finally, the overdose epidemic continues to ravage too many communities across the country. This is not a new problem, yet it has been exacerbated during COVID-19 and results in daily losses for communities nationwide. If confirmed, reaching people where they are via innovative prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery solutions will be a hallmark of the work of SAMHSA.

I realize that we may not always agree on the best approaches to solve these challenges, but I pledge to work closely with you to ensure that our decisions are transparent, our team accessible, and that SAMHSA is listening to your views.

Before I close, I must acknowledge the outpouring of support from across the country. I am deeply humbled and appreciative of all those who wrote letters or called or email and texted – thank you so much. I see you all as vital parts of the village it will take to address the behavioral health challenges we face as a nation.

Thank you for considering my nomination, and I look forward to answering your questions.