

**TESTIMONY OF VIVEK H. MURTHY, M.D.
BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS
FEBRUARY 25, 2021**

Chair Murray, Ranking Member Burr, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored and incredibly grateful for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would like to introduce my wife and best friend, Dr. Alice Chen, whose love and support has brightened my life in countless ways.

And while they weren't able to be here in person, I'm thinking today about the rest of my family who are watching from afar – my children Teyjas and Shanthi, who are our greatest joy; my grandmother Sarojini; my sister Rashmi and brother in law Amit; and especially my parents Hallegere and Myetraie Murthy, who came to this country as immigrants decades ago and set up a small medical practice in their community in Miami. As a child, I watched them make house calls in the middle of the night and wake up early to visit patients in the hospital before heading to their office. They attended birthdays, weddings, and funerals for their patients, always there in the moments that mattered because they saw their patients as family, and that's what you do for family.

I have tried to live by the lessons they embodied: that we have an obligation to help each other whenever we can, to alleviate suffering wherever we find it, and to give back to this country that made their lives and my life and the lives of my children possible.

This is a moment of tremendous suffering for our nation. More than half a million people have lost their lives to COVID-19, including beloved members of my own family. Many more are facing long-term health consequences. And millions of Americans are experiencing secondary impacts on their health – from missed preventive care, to stressful financial struggles, to anxiety and depression.

If confirmed as Surgeon General, my highest priority will be to help end this pandemic, work I've been doing over the past year with state and local officials, schools and universities, businesses, health care providers, and others. I have seen first-hand the importance of providing clear, science-based guidance to Americans on how to protect themselves and others. And I know how urgent it is that we communicate clearly about the safety and effectiveness of vaccines and get them to people as quickly as possible, particularly those in underserved rural communities and communities of color.

But as we address COVID-19, we cannot neglect the other public health crises we face, crises that have been exacerbated by this pandemic: particularly the opioid epidemic, mental illness, and glaring racial and geographic health inequities.

During my prior service as Surgeon General, I saw firsthand how these challenges are destroying lives and devastating families in every corner of this country. I listened to and learned from people in rural communities in Oklahoma and Alaska and in big cities, including Indianapolis, Indiana, New Orleans, Louisiana, and Charlotte, North Carolina. And their stories are what led me to issue the first Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health and to launch a national education campaign on opioids and safe prescribing.

But we have so much more to do, and if confirmed, I will work tirelessly to address these crises. I will do so guided always by the very best science. And I will work with Secretary-Designate Becerra, Dr. Levine, and with colleagues across the federal government and at state and local levels. Equally as important, I will work in coordination with partners outside government: community organizations, businesses, faith leaders, doctors and nurses, and educators.

I would also welcome the chance to once again work hand in hand with Congressional leaders on both sides of the aisle as I was privileged to do in the past in addressing the opioid epidemic, the Zika virus, and other public health challenges.

And I am particularly eager to work with one of our nation's great public health assets: the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, which has already helped our nation respond to Ebola, Zika, H1N1, and COVID-19 and which has the potential to be an even more robust and resilient force to protect our nation's health during and between pandemics.

I know the challenges before us are daunting. But if confirmed, I will never forget that at its essence, the role of the Surgeon General is that of a doctor – one charged with serving every single American. I learned as a doctor to approach each patient with both head and heart – science and compassion – recognizing that both have the power to heal. I learned to respect the uniqueness of each patient, recognizing that solutions must be tailored to each individual. And I learned to listen deeply to the patient in front of me, to look beyond any labels, and to see that person in their fullest humanity, knowing they were someone's mother, father, grandparent, child, sibling, or friend.

The most important job of a doctor is to help patients heal. And if confirmed, that will be my mission as Surgeon General – to do whatever I can to help heal our communities and our nation.

Thank you for your consideration of my nomination, and I'm happy to take your questions.