

**TESTIMONY OF REBECCA HAFFAJEE
BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
JULY 12, 2022**

Chairman Wyden, Ranking Member Crapo, and Members of the Committee, thank you for considering my nomination to be the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). I am honored by President Biden's decision to nominate me for this role, and, if confirmed, look forward to serving under his and Secretary Becerra's leadership.

Before I begin my testimony, I would like to thank my family. With me today is my husband, James Drabick. And supporting me virtually are my two young children, Samuel and Annabelle, as well as my father and sister, Drs. Charles and Jessica Haffajee. With me in spirit is my mother, Dr. Anne Haffajee. I would not be here today without their love and support.

My name is Rebecca Haffajee, and I am a lawyer, researcher, and a policy analyst. But before I'm those things, I'm a daughter.

Both my parents were first-generation Americans, and both were clinicians. Growing up watching them work in health care inspired my passion for improving health and well-being outcomes for all Americans.

My father is a practicing cardiologist. He loves his patients and his patients love him. Watching him be the best physician he can be for his patients and often saving their lives taught me how critical patient-centered care is to producing positive health outcomes.

My mother was a renowned dental researcher. She is also my biggest inspiration. My mother not only lovingly raised a family, but she also excelled in her career – all while battling cancer throughout much of her life. My mother's long-term cancer battle taught me how important it is to ensure we're doing what's best for people when they're experiencing health challenges.

Though I began my professional career in health care law, my passion lies in using the research process to implement policy change that improves people's health and well-being. I spent time in East Africa working in public health on research around care for children and mothers affected by HIV/AIDS. For over a decade, I focused on U.S. healthy policy research, first as a professor at the University of Michigan and then as policy researcher at the RAND Corporation. I'm passionate about my work because I believe that changes made at the federal, state, and local level have meaningful impacts when research informs policy.

While many in government and across the country are not familiar with ASPE, its work changes lives. Researchers at ASPE work to ensure the President, Secretary, and leaders across HHS have the best available data and evidence when they are making decisions and measuring the impact of their decisions to improve the country's health and well-being.

For more than a year now, I've worked in ASPE, serving as Acting Assistant Secretary. I've had the opportunity to lead much of the agency's most rigorous research and strategic planning. My

understanding of the nuts and bolts of the agency – and the Department and Administration at large – as well as the relationships I’ve built will serve me well in the role should I be confirmed.

If confirmed as the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, I would work to ensure that ASPE is focused on using the best research and data to expand health care access, strengthen behavioral health, and advance equity.

Expanding Health Care Access: We know from our work in ASPE that expanding access to health care is critical to our nation’s health and well-being. When people don’t have health care coverage or when the coverage they do have isn’t high quality, we all suffer the consequences.

Strengthening Behavioral Health: Mental health and substance use challenges have been exacerbated by COVID-19. But even before the pandemic, this area of health was under-emphasized and under-funded. ASPE can play a critical role in strengthening our nation’s behavioral health infrastructure and has demonstrated this already through its work on the Administration’s Overdose Prevention Strategy.

Advancing Equity: To understand why health inequities exist and how best to address them, we have to look at their root causes – or the social determinants of health: income, education, employment, housing, social support, and transportation. Through ASPE’s ongoing social determinants of health and equity work, we can understand how best to ensure that those in underserved and under-resourced populations don’t experience gaps in services and supports and are able to live their healthiest lives.

None of these priorities I have laid out can be achieved without strong partnership and communication, particularly with Congress and stakeholders across the health care sector.

I’ve learned in my various roles the importance of listening to and understanding the perspectives of different health stakeholders—including providers, patients, and governments. These perspectives inform research agendas, data collected and analyzed, and ultimately, effective policies.

The research ASPE provides is critical to the work of HHS and agencies across the federal government. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing ASPE’s transformative work to meet the health and well-being needs of our nation. Thank you for considering my nomination. I look forward to answering your questions.