

**TESTIMONY OF RACHEL L. LEVINE, M.D.
BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS
FEBRUARY 25, 2021**

Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Burr, distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Dr. Rachel Levine, and I am honored to be President Biden's nominee to serve as the Assistant Secretary for Health at the Department of Health and Human Services.

If I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, I look forward to working with Secretary-Designate Becerra, Dr. Murthy. And with each of you, in service to our country.

At its core, my career has been about helping people live healthy lives. As the Assistant Secretary for Health, I would be committed every day to helping the people of our nation and improving our public health. I am both humbled by the opportunity, and ready for the job.

As you know well, we each come to public service in our own unique way. In my case, I was a physician for many years specializing in pediatric and adolescent medicine and managing educational and departmental responsibilities in a major academic hospital system.

Throughout my medical career I have been particularly invested in health issues that are at the intersection of physical and behavioral health, and I brought that expertise to public health in addressing substance use disorders.

After receiving my education at Harvard College and the Tulane University School of Medicine, I trained at the Mt. Sinai Medical Center in New York City.

I practiced pediatrics and adolescent medicine at Mt. Sinai and Lenox Hill Hospital before moving to Pennsylvania and working at the Penn State College of Medicine and the Penn State Hershey Medical Center.

At Penn State, I initiated a Division of Adolescent Medicine for the care of complex teens with medical and psychological problems. In addition, I started the Penn State Hershey Eating Disorders Program, which offers multidisciplinary treatment for children, adolescents, and adults with eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa.

When I left Penn State Hershey in 2015, I was Professor of Pediatrics and Psychiatry, Vice Chair of Pediatrics for Clinical Affairs, and Chief of the Division of Adolescent Medicine and Eating Disorders.

In 2015, I was named by Governor Tom Wolf to be Physician General for Pennsylvania and confirmed unanimously to the post by the State Senate. I was confirmed twice more -- on a bipartisan basis -- to be Secretary of Health.

In both roles, I concentrated on addressing the opioid misuse and overdose crisis in the state and worked in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services on these efforts. We focused on opioid stewardship --meaning the safe, appropriate, and responsible prescribing of opioids – and teaching these practices to medical students. Additionally, we developed continuing medical education programs training providers on the safe and judicious use of opioid medication and established prescribing guidelines and a prescription drug monitoring program as part of our efforts.

One of my most significant accomplishments as Physician General was signing the first-ever statewide standing order for the distribution of the lifesaving medicine naloxone. It enabled emergency medical personnel to carry naloxone on the job to reverse overdoses and the public to readily access the medication, saving thousands of lives as a result.

As Secretary of Health through the Pennsylvania Rural Health Model, we worked to save rural hospitals by transitioning them from fee-for-service to global budget payments. This model aligned incentives for providers to deliver value-based care and for rural hospitals to transform their care to better meet community health needs.

In addition, we also established a Maternal Mortality Review Committee to better understand and respond to the causes of maternal deaths, and improve childhood immunization rates, among other priorities.

Of course, our focus changed dramatically last year, and COVID-19 became my urgent and primary focus.

We concentrated on three key priorities to combat COVID 19: Containment with expansion of testing and contact tracing. Mitigation with masks and social distancing. And medical countermeasures such as distribution of medications such as monoclonal antibodies and, of course, authorized vaccines.

As part of these efforts, we created a Health Equity Taskforce, which included many community stakeholders such as the Pittsburgh-based Black Coalition Against COVID-19 and the Latino Connection. We also launched a faith-based testing strategy where people could get tested at their places of worship.

There is still so much more to do.

If confirmed, I will continue focusing on these issues at HHS to get the pandemic under control and look forward to driving efforts and oversight within the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health that will bolster the health of our nation.

I thank you for your consideration and humbly ask for your support.

I look forward to your questions.