

Statement by  
**Melanie Anne Egorin, PhD**  
**Assistant Secretary for Legislation**  
**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**  
on  
**“Overseeing the Department of Health and Human Services’ Compliance with Congress”**  
before  
**Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic**  
**Committee on Oversight and Accountability**  
**United States House of Representatives**  
**January 31, 2024**

Chairman Wenstrup, Ranking Member Ruiz, and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate this opportunity to testify on the efforts of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS or Department) to respond to oversight requests from the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic (Subcommittee) during the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress. I am Melanie Anne Egorin, the Assistant Secretary for Legislation at HHS. Prior to coming to HHS, I spent more than 15 years working in Congress and at the Government Accountability Office (GAO), including serving on the professional staff of the House Committee on Ways and Means for nearly 10 years. I have a deep appreciation for the important work of Congress and the role that oversight plays in the furtherance of Congress’s legislative function. As I noted in prior testimony for my confirmation to serve as the Assistant Secretary for Legislation, I believe it is vital that we ask questions about current policies and programs so we can improve programmatic integrity, our health care system, and the overall health of the nation.

HHS’s mission is to enhance the health and well-being of all Americans. We accomplish this mission every day by providing for effective health and human services and by fostering sound, sustained scientific advances that underly medicine, public health, and social services. Our 12 operating divisions include nine agencies in the U.S. Public Health Service and three human services agencies. Collectively, these divisions administer a wide variety of health and human services programs. From providing access to health care coverage to more than 100 million people through Medicare, Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program, and the Health Insurance Marketplace, and services provided through the Indian Health Service, Community Health Centers, and the U.S. Public Health Service, to working to protect Americans from health, safety, and security threats both foreign and domestic, and overseeing the safety, effectiveness, and quality of foods, drugs, vaccines, and medical devices, HHS programs touch the lives of all Americans.

I appreciate the opportunity to highlight the hard work of the Department, essential workers, and everyone involved in the whole-of-government approach to combatting COVID-19. While COVID-19 is not over, and it remains a public health priority, we have the tools – vaccines, tests, and treatments – to manage the virus. We are in a different place today than we were three years

ago. We made it safer for people to live their lives with more than 700 million COVID vaccines administered. And we are using everything we have learned during the emergency to strengthen our public health infrastructure to be better prepared for future emergencies. HHS will continue to work to ensure that Americans continue to be safe and have access to care and support they need. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, a record-breaking 21.3 million Americans enrolled in affordable health care coverage through the ACA's marketplace just this year.

### **Addressing Congress's Oversight Requests**

As part of its critical mission to enhance and protect the health and well-being of all Americans, HHS regularly interacts with Congress and responds to congressional oversight requests. HHS recognizes and appreciates the importance of congressional oversight and is committed to continuing to work with Congress in good faith to address its informational needs while balancing the institutional interests of the Department and the Executive Branch. Given the breadth of the programs administered by the Department as one of the largest agencies in the federal government, we receive inquiries from virtually every Member's office and regularly receive a variety of oversight requests from over ten committees in both the House and Senate. Since the 118th Congress began, the Department has sent hundreds of letters responding to inquiries from Congress, produced more than 30,000 pages of documents in response to committees' oversight requests, and responded to thousands of other congressional letters, inquiries, and requests for information and assistance. Department officials also have testified at numerous oversight hearings and provided frequent briefings for committee staff in connection with various inquiries. We are also actively responding to 140 ongoing engagements with GAO—and we have been able to close over 120 GAO recommendations during this Congress alone.

In responding to the substantial volume of congressional oversight requests, we engage in the constitutionally mandated accommodation process, seeking to respond to Congress's legitimate efforts to seek information in aid of its legislative function in a manner consistent with Executive Branch interests, while being cognizant of resource constraints. We receive many broad and complex oversight requests that may involve multiple components of the Department. Such requests require appropriate time and attention to allow us to provide accurate and responsive information to Congress. At times, committees also have requested particularly sensitive information, including information implicating biosecurity and biosafety, ongoing internal investigations, national security, personal health information (PHI), and personally identifiable information (PII). In situations like these, we have pursued accommodations that balance the Congress' interests with our obligation to safeguard certain information. In all cases, we work hard to respond to Congress's oversight requests about the Department's policies and programs.

### **Responding to the Subcommittee's Oversight Requests**

With respect to the subject of today's hearing, the Department has been exceptionally responsive to the Subcommittee's wide-ranging inquiries. The Department has been actively engaging with the Subcommittee regarding its many oversight requests and letters this Congress, while the Department has continued to respond to over 150 oversight letters, containing hundreds of discrete requests, from others in the House and Senate. To date, these efforts include providing the Subcommittee with more than 35 document productions consisting of more than 10,000 pages, including documents specifically identified by your staff as highest priority to your various inquiries. The Department has also made 11 current and former officials available for all-day transcribed interviews, in addition to making numerous other Department officials available for briefings and hearings. In total, HHS has facilitated nearly 100 hours of briefings, interviews, and testimony before the Subcommittee, touching on a wide variety of topics of interest. During a period of budgetary constraint, the Department has committed significant resources to these efforts, with Department staff devoting thousands of hours to accommodating the Subcommittee's requests during the current Congress alone.

Like you, we agree that valuable, bipartisan work remains to be done to improve pandemic preparedness, and we remain committed to working with you to achieve that goal. As we have communicated to your staff, the Department's response to your inquiries remains ongoing, as demonstrated by our regular productions in recent weeks. In all instances, the Department has worked in good faith to understand the Subcommittee's priorities and target our efforts effectively.

## **Conclusion**

As I believe my testimony today reflects, HHS has a demonstrated record of working diligently to address a broad range of oversight requests from this Subcommittee and other oversight bodies. We look forward to continuing to work with this Subcommittee and others to respond to oversight requests in a timely manner consistent with the accommodation process, while upholding the institutional interests of the Department.