

**TESTIMONY OF DR. VIVEK MURTHY
BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
MARCH 1, 2023**

Chairman Booker, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of the committee – I’m deeply honored by the opportunity to appear before you today as President Biden’s nominee to serve as Representative of the United States on the Executive Board of the World Health Organization.

I would not be here today were it not for the love and support of my wife and my best friend, Dr. Alice Chen; my children, Teyjas and Shanthi; my sister, Rashmi and brother-in-law Amit; my grandmother Sarojini; and especially my parents, Hallegere and Myetraie Murthy.

It was my father and mother who inspired me to become a doctor and to enter public service. I spent afternoons after school and on weekends in the small clinic they ran in Miami, greeting patients and watching my parents at work. Over time, I came to see that healing was about more than diagnoses made and medicines prescribed; it was also about building relationships and empowering people with the tools necessary to keep themselves, and their families, healthy.

Through their words and actions, my parents taught me that health is the most important investment we can make – it is the foundation for prosperity and happiness. I came to see that this was true not only for individuals, but for communities, for nations, and for the world.

This lesson became the foundation of my career in medicine and public health. Nearly 30 years ago, it inspired me to launch VISIONS, an organization focused on HIV/AIDS prevention that organized youth-led education workshops and trained students to be educators and community leaders. It’s the lesson that guided me when launching the Swasthya Community Health Partnership in rural India, which trained local young women to be community health workers and community leaders. It informed the way I have cared for patients and their families over the years.

And the lesson from my parents has guided my work as Surgeon General. Over two terms, I’ve had countless conversations our fellow Americans to learn about their health concerns and needs. I’ve worked to advance solutions to opioid addiction, tobacco-related disease, mental illness, and other public health challenges. And I’ve worked with community organizations, government leaders at all levels and from both parties, and countless Americans to address global health threats that have impacted the United States, from Ebola and Zika to COVID-19.

My experiences dealing with domestic and global health matters have made clear to me that the health of Americans requires effective partnership and coordination with the rest of the world, to ensure early detection, rapid response, and containment of public health threats. This is a place where the World Health Organization has a vital role to play. And the United States must ensure that the WHO plays this role effectively.

That’s why my top priorities for the position, if confirmed, are strong governance at the WHO and making sure we’re better prepared for the next pandemic. Given the significant, decades-

long investment in the WHO by the United States, we have the ability and the responsibility to demand clarity, transparency, and accountability in all WHO operations. That includes ensuring that the WHO uses its position to help build stronger and more resilient health systems around the world, that its approach to public health threats is rapid and robust, that resources are used responsibly, and that decision-making is transparent. It also means demanding that the WHO workforce be held to the highest ethical standards, and that there is zero tolerance for abuse and exploitation.

Ensuring we are better prepared for the next pandemic will require the WHO to see that the lessons of COVID-19 and prior infectious disease threats are reflected in a clear strategy for addressing future pandemics, including effective surveillance and detection, rapid response, and sustained efforts to support recovery. It also will require successful engagement on negotiations currently underway to strengthen the International Health Regulations and develop a new pandemic accord to address broader gaps in pandemic preparedness.

An effective WHO can help the world address not only future pandemics, but also ongoing public health challenges, from maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria to noncommunicable diseases and mental illness, which are robbing more and more people of their health, productivity, and fulfillment. Mental health is an area I have focused on during my tenure as Surgeon General. It has now become a global crisis. I believe the United States is uniquely positioned to provide the empathetic, thoughtful, and urgent leadership that this issue demands. If I have the privilege of serving as U.S. Representative to the WHO Executive Board, it is my intention to strengthen America's voice and leadership on mental health on the world stage.

I recognize that this is a time of great challenge for America and the world when it comes to health. But I also believe that we have a window of opportunity to strengthen our institutions and processes so we are more prepared than before COVID-19. That is my guiding principle. I hope to have the opportunity to do so as U.S. Representative to the WHO Executive Board, working hand-in-hand with partners in Congress and across the Administration.

Thank you for your consideration of my nomination. I look forward to your questions.