

## U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

### U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security

**Witnesses: Samuel Levine, Director, Bureau of Consumer Protection, Federal Trade Commission; Teresa Murray, Director of Consumer Watchdog Office, U.S. Public Interest Research Group; Mary Engle, Executive Vice President for Policy, BBB National Programs; Todd Leatherman, Program Counsel for the National Attorneys General Training & Research, Institute Center for Consumer Protection; National Association of Attorneys General**

February 1, 2022

### Question & Answer with Witnesses

[\[AUDIO\]](#) [\[VIDEO\]](#)

**Cantwell:** [Thank you for holding this] hearing. Thank you to my colleague, the ranking member, Senator Wicker for being here for this important hearing and the witnesses today.

Since the onset of the pandemic, consumers across the country have been victimized by a range of scams related to COVID-19, including fake COVID-19 tests, cures, price gouging, phishing scams. And these are more than just an annoyance they put the lives of individuals really at risk.

So I am sad to see in the Seattle Times today a headline “COVID testing company fake test results lied to patients,” and that our Attorney General in the State of Washington is following suit. The lawsuit, which was filed yesterday describes how an Illinois based company with at least 13 COVID-19, testing sites operating in Washington, took advantage of Washington residents and consumers, some in other parts of the country as well. At a time when the Omicron infection infections were rising at a skyrocketing rate.

Consumers complained that they did not get test results that there were reports that companies stuffed tests into trash bags. Reports also surface that employees did not wear protective gear or masks or gloves. And one resident particularly worried because he provided a copy of his driver's license and syringe card with obviously important personal information and other resident visited the site was uneasy from the start when she entered a makeshift storefront to find an empty office except for two folding chairs and was in still waiting to hear about her test results.

So I hope that the witnesses will be able to answer important questions for the record today. The alleged fraud has serious consequences. And I want to make sure that consumers in Washington have confidence to go get these tests, and that these sites so I hope that that the FTC will look into this matter. There are issues about whether the FTC will make sure the FTC has the proper authority. The FTC reports that since 2020, there have been nearly 300,000

reported instances of fraud, resulting in more than 690 669 million in total fraud losses. So I hope that the FTC, responding by sending warning letters, but obviously we wanted and have sought for much quicker action on that. The Commission needs to take stronger tools to find companies who peddle fake treatment and cures and who endanger the public.

So, I'll look forward, Mr. Chairman, to have comments from our witnesses on that. We pass the Consumer Protection Act and Senator Wicker and I were sponsors of that, yet the FTC only has brought three civil penalty cases with this authority. So, we want a strong FTC pursuing these cases about misperceptions, fraudulent activity as it relates to consumers in the time of a COVID crisis. So thank you, Mr. Chairman.