

Testimony of Patricia Neuman, Sc.D.
United States Senate Committee on Finance
Nomination Hearing
September 28, 2023

Chairman Wyden, Ranking Member Crapo, and Members of this Committee, I am honored to be here today to be considered for the public trustee position for the Medicare, Social Security and Disability Insurance Trust Funds, along with my colleague, Demetrios Kouzoukas. I appreciate your taking the time for this hearing. I am deeply grateful to President Biden for nominating me to be considered for this important position. I am also so very grateful for the support of my family, friends and colleagues, some of whom are here today, and most especially, my husband, Perry Pockros, my daughter, Julia, and my son, Ben.

Social Security and Medicare are bedrock programs for our nation, providing health and economic security to tens of millions of Americans, mostly older adults but also younger people with permanent disabilities, and others. These programs enjoy broad support among the general public because Americans understand the vital role they each play. It is difficult to imagine how families would manage without the financial protection provided by Social Security and Medicare.

Clearly, Social Security and Medicare face financial challenges that will require attention in the not too distant future. With an aging population, a declining worker to retiree ratio, and – in the case of Medicare – rising health care costs, both the Social Security and the Medicare Hospital Insurance Trust Funds are projected to have insufficient funds to fully cover obligated expenses before the end of this coming decade.

Each year, the trustees issue a report on the financial status of these programs. The role of the public trustees is to assure the public of the integrity of the operations and sustainability of the trust funds, and to help the public understand the fiscal challenges facing these programs. The trustees work closely with the actuaries from the Department of Health and Human Services and the Social Security Administration to be sure that projections are based on sound assumptions, the right questions are being asked, and the presentation of findings is clear, while recognizing that modeling by its very nature is an inexact science.

In some ways, I have prepared for this position my entire professional life, working on issues related to health and retirement security for older Americans. My first job on Capitol Hill was on the staff of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, chaired by Senator Heinz, working right here in the Dirksen building. I went on to be trained as a researcher at what is now called the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, where I received a masters in health finance and doctorate in health policy. I later served on the professional staff of the House Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health, where the annual report of the Medicare trustees was a major focus of our work.

Currently, I am a Senior Vice President, the Executive Director of the Program on Medicare Policy, and Senior Advisor to the CEO at KFF (formerly known as the Kaiser Family Foundation). Our mission at KFF is to serve as a nonpartisan source of information for policymakers, the media, the health policy community, and the public. We do not take policy positions – similar to the role of the public trustees.

At KFF, I have conducted and directed research, written numerous papers and spoken to a broad set of audiences about Medicare and related issues for older Americans. I have examined options to strengthen the financial solvency of the Medicare trust fund. I have been a resource for policymakers and others in explaining the challenges facing Medicare, and the implications for beneficiaries and program spending. Collectively, this work has provided the foundational knowledge and experience needed to carry out the responsibilities of a public trustee.

I understand that the primary role of a public trustee is to assure the integrity and objectivity of the projections, and that this is not a policymaking role. Relatedly, I understand that the data and analysis and other information included in these reports are essential to the important work of policymakers. I believe I have the analytic skills required to fulfill this role and the communication skills to convey that information clearly.

Since I was first nominated, I have been genuinely moved by the reactions of family members, friends and colleagues of all ages, virtually all of whom thank me, in advance, for being willing to do my part as a public trustee, if I am confirmed, mainly because they are counting on Medicare and Social Security to be in strong fiscal shape to support their health and financial security in retirement, as am I.

If I am confirmed for this position, I will work to the best of my ability to fulfill the responsibilities with rigor and integrity. I would be honored to serve in this role, and I look forward to your questions.

Thank you.