

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Ilhan Omar (MN-05)

Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

"Building a Safer Future: Private-Sector Strategies for Emerging Safety Issues"

Wednesday, May 13, 2026 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for joining us today.

All workers deserve to come home at the end of the day healthy, whole, and paid fairly for their labor. Thanks to agencies like the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), workers benefit from standards based on sound science that have pushed companies to modernize and improve their workplaces.

Today's hearing revolves around how the private sector has implemented certain programs to track and address workplace health and safety through the use of what they call "leading indicators." These leading indicators focus on whether an employer is taking proactive measures to prevent injury and illness on the job and identify weak spots where additional action may be needed to prevent worker harm.

We all want to prevent workplace injuries before they happen, and leading indicators could potentially help with that. But we must be realistic. Effectively tracking and responding to leading indicators will require a lot of investment and personnel, that small businesses are unlikely to have. Additionally, some leading indicators, when used improperly, could lead bad employers to blame their workers if an injury occurs, instead of taking the proper steps to correct a hazard in the first place.

We lack sufficient research and information to determine whether leading indicators can meaningfully improve workplace safety. Much of the research has been limited to private consultants, putting it out of reach for smaller employers. While I'm relieved that the National Safety Council has attempted to fill that gap with useful case studies, we still need comprehensive, open-sourced scientific research to evaluate these indicators. And this kind of public research would be best conducted by a well-funded and well-staffed NIOSH.

Unfortunately, the Trump Administration has made sweeping cuts to NIOSH's staffing. While those cuts have been reversed, there is still significant concern that NIOSH has lost many valuable experts to attrition, and we do not know whether the agency is being allowed to replace them. This is yet another example of how the Trump Administration's recklessness has come at the direct expense of protecting and prioritizing working Americans.

OSHA and NIOSH are our best, longstanding tools to stop workplace harm. It is vital that we fully fund and staff these agencies to identify and correct unsafe working conditions, because voluntary compliance programs or leading indicators alone will not be enough.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I am grateful that we have made emerging safety and health issues an additional theme for this hearing. As we look ahead to the transition from spring to summer, I worry that the Trump

Administration's weakened OSHA enforcement program on heat stress will leave workers vulnerable. And in turn, the workers who are able to seek medical care for heat stress will be entrusted to our nation's hardworking health care workers, who still face serious risks of workplace violence, another danger that the Trump Administration has chosen to ignore.

Our nation's miners also deserve the same protections from deadly silica dust that other workers enjoy. That is why the Biden Administration published an [Mine Safety and Health Administration] standard, but the Trump Administration has refused to enforce it and instead seems ready to weaken the rule. And this is now happening at a time when [silicosis] is re-emerging outside of mining as a health crisis, particularly for workers who manufacture or install artificial stone countertops. And yet, Congressional Republicans are actively trying to pass legislation shutting down those workers' ability to hold irresponsible companies accountable in court. These are sick workers and their families who are just trying to get compensation for lung transplants, cancer treatments, and funeral expenses.

Every worker deserves to come home safe; it should be one of the most basic obligations that we owe to all of our constituents. But this Congress and this Administration are failing to meet that.

Thank you, and I yield back.