

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

Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

"Safe Workplaces, Stronger Partnerships: The Future of OSHA Compliance Assistance"

Wednesday, July 16th, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Over the last six months, the Trump Administration has embarked on an aggressive assault on worker protections.

And just in the past two weeks, Trump's Department of Labor has released five dozen deregulatory rulemakings – two-thirds of which focus on health and safety issues.

These proposals target core worker protections, including changes to child labor rules, removing a requirement as basic and essential as having adequate lighting on construction sites, and even weakening workers' protections against asbestos.

This spree of deregulation follows months of mass firing at the very agencies tasked with researching and investigating workplace conditions—and a proposed budget that would reduce inspections and slash DOL's capacity to develop new safety standards.

The message is clear: workers' rights and protections are under attack. Compliance assistance programs, such as the Voluntary Protection Program, have their place. But they are no substitute for clear standards that are actively and effectively enforced.

No job should ever be a death sentence. Workers deserve to come home to their families at the end of the day alive, healthy, and whole.

Yet, according to the AFL-CIO, workplace hazards killed approximately one hundred forty thousand workers in 2023, including 5,283 workers from traumatic injuries and an estimated 135,000 from occupational diseases.

To protect workers from harm, Congress passed landmark safety laws and established important agencies like OSHA, MSHA, NIOSH, and the Chemical Safety and Hazards Investigation Board.

When they are allowed to do their jobs and are fully funded, these agencies save lives and prevent harm to workers. But now, the Trump Administration is attempting to strip away safety regulations and dismantle critical agencies like NIOSH & the CSB.

In doing so, they are threatening the lives of workers who rely on those safeguards and the resources these agencies provide.

In my own district, we are already feeling the consequences of these cuts. The University of Minnesota's Midwest Center for Occupational Health and Safety is one of just 18 NIOSH-funded Education and Research Centers in the nation.

It trains the next generation of workplace safety experts who will help protect our workers in high-risk industries.

Without NIOSH, the invaluable research and workforce development provided by that Center—and others like it across the country—will be lost.

That means fewer trained medical and safety professionals, less research capacity on critical issues such as heat stress, and decreased investment in innovative technologies that can prevent illness and injury.

The Trump Administration's deregulatory agenda will result in more injuries, more deaths, more grieving families – and less accountability for employers who put their workers in harm's way.

Committee Democrats are committed to honoring those workers who have been harmed or killed on the job, not just with words, but with action to change the system.

Later today, Ranking Member Scott will reintroduce a bill that will finally bring workers the common-sense protections they deserve against heat-related injury and illness.

I am a proud cosponsor of the *Asunción Valdivia Heat Illness, Injury, and Fatality Prevention Act*, which requires OSHA to finally issue an enforceable rule with the strongest feasible protections against heat illness, including paid rest breaks, access to water, shaded or cooled recovery areas, and training that is delivered in a language and format that workers understand.

These are sensible safeguards that will save lives.

Ranking Member Scott, Representative Courtney, and I also reintroduced the *Protecting America's Workers Act*, which would make long-overdue improvements to the enforcement of the *Occupational Safety and Health Act*. This bill would expand coverage to millions of workers currently excluded from the law's protections and strengthen whistleblower protections.

These reforms are critical to preventing the most serious violations that endanger workers' safety.

Democrats are offering real solutions to the problems workers face on the job instead of ripping away protections.

I hope that our discussion today can center around ensuring that workers come home safely at the end of the day.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I request unanimous consent to enter into the record a statement from the United Steelworkers about the compliance assistance programs we will be discussing today.

Thank you, and I yield back.