

MARIA YOUNG, WITNESS STATEMENT
U.S. Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
Hearing: Unmasked: How Biden Health Officials Purposely Turned a Blind Eye Toward
COVID-19 Vaccine Safety Signals
April 29, 2026, 2:30 pm ET

My name is Maria Young. Thank you to the Committee members for inviting me here to share my story today.

Survivor. Warrior. Miracle. These are all words that have been used to describe me over the last five years. They aren't words I would have ever chosen for myself. For me, I was just trying to regain the life I had lost to COVID before we had vaccines or any possible treatments.

In 2020, I went from being a healthy, active woman with a full career to being sedated, paralyzed, and placed on life support within days. I became a survivor of severe COVID-19 and ARDS (Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome) after spending 69 days on ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) and 70 days on a ventilator. I am here because survival is not the end of the story.

For those unfamiliar, ECMO is a form of life support used when the lungs can no longer function on their own. Blood is removed from the body, oxygenated by a machine, and returned. It is invasive, complex, and used only when all other options have failed. ECMO does not heal the lungs; it buys time and hope. But that hope comes with significant risks: stroke, neurological injury, blood clots, infections, limb loss, organ failure, and of course, death.

I spent more than four months in the hospital, most of it in the intensive care unit (ICU), most of it in a medically induced coma, and most of it alone. When I finally woke up, I had no memory of the time that had passed and no understanding yet of how much I had lost.



During those months, my family lived through trauma that still echoes today. My mother was told repeatedly that I was not expected to survive. My sister wrote my eulogy. My family prepared themselves for the unimaginable — all without being able to see me in person. Day after day, my mother waited by the phone for a call from my doctor with the update for that day. They carried grief and hope at the same time, a burden that families of critically ill patients know all too well.

While I was unconscious, my body endured a long list of complications that many ECMO survivors face:

- Multiple infections, including one that almost took my vision
- Blood clots
- Collapsed lungs
- Severe muscle wasting and deconditioning
- Delirium and hallucinations
- Prolonged sedation and sedation drug withdrawal
- Several blood transfusions
- Tracheostomy
- Feeding tube
- Pressure wounds
- A deep neck wound from cannulation
- Long-term cognitive and physical impacts

These complications are not footnotes; they are the reality of surviving critical respiratory illness. They shape recovery for months and years. They are especially hard when the diagnosis and treatment lack understanding and support.

When I finally woke up, I had to relearn how to breathe, swallow, sit up, stand, and walk. I had to rebuild my life from the ground up. And while I am deeply grateful to be alive, gratitude does not erase the trauma. Survival comes with weight, the weight of knowing

how close I came to dying and that many others weren't as lucky. When I was discharged, my list of diagnoses included dysautonomia, demoralization, severe body deconditioning, long COVID, partial vocal cord paralysis, and post-intensive care syndrome, among others.

But alongside that weight is profound gratitude. Gratitude for the nurses who spoke to me even when I was unconscious. Gratitude for the respiratory therapists who taught me how to breathe again. Gratitude for the physical and occupational therapists who celebrated every inch of progress. Gratitude for the doctors at Johns Hopkins who made bold decisions, including placing me on my stomach while on ECMO to try to improve my lung function and oxygenation, something that had never been done there before because they believed my life was worth fighting for. And gratitude for my community, who held my family up when they could no longer stand on their own.



My experience led me into advocacy. Over the last several years, I have connected with hundreds of survivors, people living with long COVID, families who lost loved ones to COVID-19 or while on ECMO, and ECMO survivors who carry scars both visible and invisible. These communities are full of people who fought for their lives or their loved ones' lives and then emerged into a world that often moved on without them. Many feel abandoned by systems not built for long-term recovery, by insurance structures that don't recognize the complexity of post-ICU life, and by a public narrative that treats survival as the end of the story. My work is to make sure they are seen, heard, and supported.

Today, I live with both the past and the present. The past is the trauma of nearly dying from COVID-19, the grief my family still carries, and the gratitude we feel for every person who helped save my life. The present is the reality that my lungs will never be the same, my immune system will never be the same, and my vulnerability to infectious diseases will never be the same.

That's why I stay up to date with my COVID boosters and other vaccinations. I also continue my advocacy with organizations like Vaccinate Your Family, to share my story through them and through my personal connections, to encourage everyone I can to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, in the hopes of helping others avoid the same traumatic experience I and my family went through, or worse.

Survival should not be followed by fear. It should be followed by support, protection, and the chance to rebuild a life with dignity.

Thank you for your time.