Nicole Parker - Opening Statement

Chairman Jordan, Ranking Member Plaskett and Members of the Subcommittee, I would like to thank you for inviting me to come and respectfully speak with you today.

The people of this country deserve the right to have faith in those sworn to protect. Faith is the foundation of hope; hope can be restored through honest reflection of who we have become, and who we could and should be.

On September 11, 2001, I was working for Merrill Lynch in the World Financial Center in New York City. I witnessed up-close the horrific deadly terrorist attacks on the adjacent World Trade Center. My colleagues and I evacuated our building and were led to safety thanks to the heroic efforts of NYPD officers. 2,977 souls were not as fortunate that day. As I watched the mayhem unfold to include people jumping to their deaths, I was shocked. Heartbroken. I vowed to God that I would give back and serve this great nation.

This vow led me to leave a multi-billion-dollar hedge fund in 2009 and apply to become an FBI Special Agent. According to the Wall Street Journal, around 45-thousand people applied to be special agents that fiscal year. About 900 made the cut. I was one of them. After five months of arduous training at the Academy in Quantico, I was a sworn-in Special Agent, assigned to the Miami Division. I considered it a sacred responsibility and was honored to be entrusted to protect and serve the American people.

My entire career was spent in the field where I believed I could make the strongest impact in rescuing victims and putting criminals behind bars.

It was my privilege to work alongside the finest and brightest in the FBI, local law enforcement and our federal partners, participating in the investigations of myriad criminal cases: The Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida; the 2017 Fort Lauderdale Airport shooting; the Cesar Sayoc pipe bomb case; multi-million-dollar Ponzi schemes; crimes on the high-seas; bank robberies; murders for hire; sexual assaults; extortions and more.

Yes, it was physically taxing and emotionally jarring. But I believed I was making an impactful difference. Every day I woke up and embraced being an FBI Special Agent.

Until things changed.

Over the course of my 12-plus years of service, the FBI's trajectory transformed. On paper, the Bureau's mission remained the same but its priorities and governing principles shifted dramatically.

The FBI became politically weaponized, starting from the top in Washington trickling down to the field offices. Although FBI employees have their first amendment rights, they are not at the liberty to allow their personal political views or preferences to determine their course of action or inaction in any investigation. Lady justice must remain blind. Those that do not uphold these responsibilities cause a negative ripple effect throughout the agency in the field.

It's as if there became two FBI's.

Americans see this, and it is destroying the Bureau's credibility, causing Americans to lose faith in the agency and therefore the hardworking and highly ethical agents who still do the heavy-lifting and pursue noble cases. It makes it difficult for agents to do their job when the FBI loses the respect of the American people.

There has also been a shift in recruiting practices – a lowering of the eligibility requirements – which is negatively impacting the agency's performance.

All this adds up to a loss of trust in the FBI by many Americans and low morale among many FBI employees. For many, becoming a Special Agent was their calling in life but now it's merely a dangerous high-risk job with minimal contentment.

Wary of consequences that come with voicing their displeasure, these agents keep their heads low, work hard, stay off the radar, and count down the days until they collect their well-deserved pension.

For me, distancing myself from egregious mistakes, immoral behavior, politically charged actions taken by a small but destructive few FBI employees became exhausting. Although I was always treated with the highest level of respect in the Miami Division, I no longer felt that I was the type of agent the FBI valued.

I began to lose passion for the career I'd loved.

Peace came as I reflected on the victims I assisted and the criminals I took off the streets. I remembered positive performance reviews, awards and accolades I'd been given as I left nothing on the line in my work as a Special Agent. I held out as long as I could hoping things would improve. But finally, I knew. It was time to go. So, less than four months ago, of my own volition, I made the difficult decision and quietly walked away from the FBI with an exemplary and spotless record.

I love the FBI I joined. I have treasured memories working alongside remarkable people. I'm proud to have served with honor as a Special Agent. And while I sincerely pray for the FBI's future success, the FBI's troubles of late are bigger than anything I could change. Going forward I will continue serving others and our beloved country while honoring and celebrating the true heroes, both past and present, of the FBI.

When I was invited to participate in this hearing, my initial reaction was to decline the request as there may be others more capable who would do a much better job than me. And why would I want to subject myself to the stress of testifying, putting a target on my back and likely face public scrutiny? As I prayed about this invitation, the thought came to me, “to whom much is given, much is required.” I realized this is not about me. I have been given the opportunity to speak up on behalf of numerous current and former Bureau employees who feel similarly but do not have a voice.

I am not here today to show favor to any political party – I am here to stand for the truth based on my experience at the FBI. In all humility, I hope to make an impact in creating a stronger agency which is what Americans deserve.