

## **Testimony of Gary Talwar**

### **Vice President of Natural Stone Resources**

#### **Committee on the Judiciary**

#### **Subcommittee on Courts, Intellectual Property, Artificial Intelligence, and the Internet**

#### **United States House of Representatives**

#### **Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Protecting the American Stone Slab Industry from Lawfare**

**January 14, 2026**

Chairman Issa, Ranking Member Johnson and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to share the history of my family's business, Natural Stone Resources, how the silica lawsuits are impacting us, and why we support H.R. 5437, the "Protection of Lawful Commerce in Stone Slab Products Act."

My name is Gary Talwar, and I'm the Vice President of Natural Stone Resources, a family-owned stone distribution company in Anaheim, California. I'd like to begin by telling you the story of how my parents came to this country and built our business from the ground up.

In 1980, my parents immigrated legally from India. They chose to come to America because they believed in the American Dream—the idea that through hard work and perseverance, they could create a better future for their family.

When they arrived, my Dad took a job in my Mom's uncle's warehouse, which imported Indian spices. He started out doing physical labor—lifting 100-pound bags of rice and doing whatever needed to be done. That was how he learned the basics of working in the U.S., through sheer hard work. My mother was pregnant at the time with my elder sister, also working for her uncle on the retail side as a cashier. She was back to work four days after giving birth, with my sister joining her behind the register in a portable crib.

After that, my father took an entry-level job at Taco Bell and worked his way up to become a manager. Then he managed an Indian restaurant. By 1990, my parents decided to take the big leap and open their own fast-food restaurant in Manhattan Beach, California. I was very young at the time, and after school, I'd go to the restaurant, and they made a little corner in the kitchen for me to play and take naps while they worked.

They opened a second restaurant in Los Angeles in 1996. Then in 1999, my Mom's brother in India helped my Dad get started in the stone business. That's when Natural Stone Resources began. My Dad essentially became the U.S. sales office for the family's stone factories in India,

selling directly to large distributors. Over time, we closed the restaurants and focused entirely on the stone business.

I started working for my Dad around 2002, helping out during my school breaks. In 2005, we purchased our first warehouse, and I helped in a number of capacities, including becoming our first forklift operator. By 2008, we expanded into the building next door, and in 2014, we moved into our current headquarters in Anaheim. Today, we have two locations in Anaheim, a distribution center in Atlanta, and we import about 3,500 different products from 17 different countries. Most importantly, we employ about 70 great people who we consider family.

In short, this is the story of a true American Dream. My parents came here, worked incredibly hard, and built a family business that now supports many employees and their families.

That history matters because it explains what's at stake today.

Natural Stone Resources is a distributor - we do not fabricate stone, we do not cut it, grind it, or polish it. We do not operate fabrication shops and we do not control the safety standards or practices used when stone is cut. Like most distributors in our industry, our role ends when slabs leave our warehouse. We don't even sell to fabricators or contractors. Our niche is to distribute product to wholesalers and other distributors.

Silicosis is a serious and absolutely preventable disease. Worker safety matters, and no one is denying that. The real issue at the heart of this problem is unsafe workplaces—specifically fabrication shops that are not following established OSHA regulations. At our business, we follow OSHA regulations every day. We don't cut corners and we put safety first. Everyone else should as well.

Fabricators have their own OSHA standards when cutting stone and quartz. Those rules exist for a reason. When they are followed, fabrication can be done safely. When they are ignored, workers are put at risk.

It's also important to say something that is simply common sense in our industry: stone and quartz contain silica, and people should not breath in stone dust. That is not a mystery. Everyone involved—from distributors to fabricators—understands that. That's exactly why OSHA regulations exist and why compliance matters.

At NSR, we take workplace safety seriously. Even though we do not cut stone, we follow all applicable OSHA standards for handling materials. We conduct monthly safety trainings for our entire staff and perform an annual OSHA audit—not just to confirm compliance, but to identify areas where we can do better. The good fabrication shops do the same. It takes a real commitment to employee safety to operate that way, and it comes with cost. We don't cut corners on safety because of cost—and responsible operators across this industry don't either.

What has been shocking to many of us is being held responsible for something we have zero control over.

Distributors do not control how slabs are cut. We do not control whether a shop uses wet cutting, ventilation, or PPE. We are not present at fabrication sites. Yet distributors and manufacturers—many of them small, family-owned businesses—are increasingly being named in lawsuits for injuries tied to unsafe third-party fabrication practices.

In addition to following OSHA's silica rules, all of us must follow rules about the safe handling of stone slabs, some of which are 1,200 pounds. Manufacturers and distributors of stone slabs should not be held liable for injuries incurred in a fab shop that result from moving the slab in an unsafe manner. Similarly, we should not be held responsible for unsafe and noncompliant third-party fabrication practices. I hope this just makes common sense.

Over the past week, I've spoken with friends and colleagues across the country in this industry. Many of them have been named in 50 to 100 lawsuits each. Several have already spent hundreds of thousands of dollars just trying to defend themselves. Two of them told me they don't know how they can keep fighting—not because they did anything wrong, but because the legal costs and time demands are overwhelming. They're being forced to choose between defending themselves and actually running their businesses. Some are seriously considering shutting their doors.

That's what brings me here today.

I'm not here just for my company. I'm here to represent the very fabric of our industry—family-owned businesses that were built through hard work, sacrifice, and responsibility.

This past Saturday, I met with my Dad at our office. He got emotional and said to me, "*I remember starting this business on our couch—and now you're going to Congress on behalf of our entire industry.*" That moment really put into perspective what this hearing means—not just to us, but to so many families whose livelihoods depend on these businesses.

I'm truly honored to be here testifying before this Subcommittee on behalf of our industry. My hope is that we can refocus accountability where it belongs—on workplace safety, OSHA compliance, and the parties who actually control fabrication practices—while protecting and preserving the small businesses that form the backbone of this industry.