

Chairman Raskin, Chairwoman Chu, Committee and CAPAC members:

I am honored to be here today. I am Sherry Chen, born in China and proud to become a US citizen in 1997. I started working for the National Weather Service in 2007. As a hydrologist, my job duty was to produce daily river forecasts and to build a forecast model for the Ohio River and its tributaries to improve our flood forecast capabilities. After years of hard work, I successfully developed the model, which has been used by federal government agencies, universities and consulting firms. During the record flooding of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers in 2011 the model was utilized effectively by the National Weather Service and the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers to make important decisions and literally help save lives. That year I was privileged to be selected to receive a national award, Larry R. Johnson Special Award, given to me and a few others for producing lifesaving river forecasts. I was very proud to serve my country.

I could have never imagined that my life and career would be turned upside down three years later. On October 20, 2014, I drove to work thinking it was any other day. Shortly after I entered the building, six FBI agents suddenly jumped on me and arrested me in front of my coworkers.

Unbeknownst to me, someone falsely had reported me as a potential security risk, describing me as a “Chinese national.” With my arrest I faced charges that carried a potential penalty of 25 years in prison and \$1 Million in fines. To my great relief, in March 2015, less than a week before the trial was scheduled to begin, the government announced it was dismissing all the charges against me.

After the charges were dropped, all I wanted was to go back to work, put the nightmare behind me and move on with my life and my family’s life. But that never happened because the Commerce Department refused to let me return to work. In March 2016, the agency terminated my employment, based largely on the same false allegations leading to my wrongful arrest and prosecution. My life was turned upside down once again.

I challenged the termination by filing an appeal with the Merit Systems Protection Board. After a full hearing, the judge issued a decision in my favor in April 2018. The judge rejected the agency’s false allegations and charges against me and ordered the Department of Commerce to immediately reinstate my employment. Throughout the decision, the judge was highly critical about the wrongdoings of the

officials at multiple levels of the agency. Ultimately, the judge concluded that I was a “victim of a gross injustice.”

After the court decision, several dozens of members of congress and over a hundred of community Organizations sent letters to the commerce department expressing their concerns of my case. But the agency ignored the concerns, instead of issuing an apology and complying with the court decision, it filed an appeal. Until now, my life is still in limbo. My reputation is still under a cloud. The ordeal has taken away precious time in my professional career, and I can never recover the years I have lost. This injustice has now entered its tenth year and sadly there is still no end in sight. I keep fighting not only for myself but to do my part to make sure no one should ever be harmed because of their race or country origin.