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(202) 226-6898

Contact: Peter Karafotas

SCHAKOWSKY UNVEILS TWO BILLS TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM

WASHINGTON, DC.—U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Vice-Chair of the Subcommittee on

U.S. Rep. Schakowsky's statement in the Congressional Record:

Monday, March 26, 2007

Madam Speaker, today I am once again introducing two bills that would help prevent needless deaths and injuries of young children: the Infant and Toddler Durable Product Safety Act and the Danny Keysar Child Product Safety Notification Act. These bills would help us protect infant and toddlers from dangerous products, both before they arrive on the shelves--and after they end up in homes.

The Infant and Toddler Durable Product Safety Act would require infant and toddler products to receive a federal seal of approval before they are sold. This bill is long overdue.

Currently, most consumers believe that, because a product is on a shelf, it is safe. A Coalition for Consumer Rights' survey in Illinois found that 75 percent of adults believe that the government oversees pre-market testing for children's products; 79 percent believe that manufacturers are required to test the safety of those products before they are sold. For most products, neither is true.

In fact, there are no mandatory safety standards for the majority of the children's products being sold today. The majority of the standards that are in place are ``voluntarily" set by the very industries

looking to make profits. They are also allowed to police themselves about whether the standards are enforced.

Let me stress what that means: although there may be voluntary standards in place, there are no requirements that all potential hazards are addressed in those standards. For instance, the voluntary standards for bassinets set by the industry did not have height requirement for the sides or any test to make sure the baby couldn't fall out. Only because of the tenacity of advocates like Kids in Danger, was one finally set. There are also no consequences for the manufacturer if the standards are not met, and no requirements for products to be tested to see if the standards are met. This is true even for baby carriers, cradles, play pens, and high chairs. For the few products that do have mandatory federal standards, because there are no testing requirements, the standards are meaningless.

Although the Consumer Products Safety Commission--the CPSC--requires no testing and manufacturers may or may not perform their own tests, do not be mistaken, children's products are tested. They are tested in our own homes, with our children and grandchildren as test dummies. The cost of those tests can be a panicked child, amputated fingers, fractured skulls, or a dead child.

Unfortunately, a trip to the emergency room or the morgue is often the only way to know if a product is unsafe. This is unacceptable.

Parents and caregivers must have assurance that when they buy a product, it will be safe. Therefore, the Infant and Toddler Durable Product Safety Act would not only require the CPSC to issue mandatory safety standards for infant and toddler products, it would require the testing and certification of these products by an independent third party before they are allowed to be sold to anyone.

To protect children should unsafe products make it into their homes--as is currently happening--we also have to make sure that we can get the hazards out as soon as possible. The Danny Keysar Child Product Safety Notification Act would help us do that by requiring that all children's durable products sold have recall registration cards attached to them and that manufacturers directly contact those who fill them out should there be a recall.

Although there is a shocking number of recalled products, our current recall system is failing. Actual notice of a recall is dependent on news outlets picking up the story and spreading the word. Notification targeted to owners of the products is rare, and many parents remain unaware of the dangers even when products are recalled. In fact, many families still have the dangerous products listed in this report in

their homes because they have not happened to turn on the television at the right time or read the right newspaper. We need to make sure that notification is directed at the families that have bought these faulty products so they don't have to rely on chance to hear the news.

My colleague, Rep. Fred Upton, and I named our bill that would help solve this problem the Danny Keysar Child Product Safety Notification Act because his story is a tragic example of the inadequacy of our current recall practices.

Danny Keysar, the precious 17-month old son of Linda Ginzel and her husband, Boaz Keysar, died when the Playskool Travel-Lite portable crib he had been napping in at his babysitter's home collapsed. The rails of the crib folded into a "V"-shaped wedge when he stood up, trapping his neck. He was strangled to death. It was May 12, 1998, five years after the CPSC had ordered it off the shelves because it was so dangerous.

Word of its hazard had not reached Danny's parents, the caregiver with whom he was staying, or a state safety inspector who visited the home just eight days before Danny's death. Had the Child Product Safety Notification Act been in effect, there would have been a much greater chance of saving Danny's life--and the 11 children who have since died from the TravelLite.

We know that recall registration cards work. My bill is modeled after the National Highway and Transportation Safety Administration's recall system for car seats. Since NHTSA started requiring car seats to have registration cards in 1993, the number of families registering increased by at least tenfold. In fact, 53 percent of parents who obtained cards mailed in the cards. Recall repair rates have gone up by 56 percent--all for a mere 43-cents per item. This bill will give families a much greater chance to repair, return, or discard any dangerous products that have made it into their children's nursery.

It is past due that we give parents the security they deserve and children the safety they need. I urge my colleagues to support these two bills.