



Congressman José E. Serrano

Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government

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Opening Statement of Chairman José E. Serrano Hearing on the Consumer Product Safety Commission's Fiscal Year 2009 Budget Request March 11, 2008

Today's hearing is on the fiscal year 2009 budget request of the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

The CPSC's emphasis is on protecting consumers from an unreasonable risk of injury and death that could result from faulty and defective products. The agency watches over 15,000 different types of consumer products. The actions of the CPSC have contributed to substantial reductions in consumer product-related deaths from fire, electrocution, carbon monoxide, poisoning, and accidents related to baby products such as walkers and cribs. However, as we have seen from the increase in recalls during the past several months, there is much more to be done.

Until this year, the CPSC was an agency that was slowly bleeding to death from budget cuts and staff reductions. The Commission had 978 employees in 1980; at the beginning of this year they had fewer than 400. At the same time, the number of imported consumer products has been increasing substantially. Over 85 percent of all recalled products are imports, and over 85 percent of all toys sold in the United States are made overseas. Recalls of unsafe toys and other children's products are making headlines. The CPSC clearly did not have enough resources, nor was it as aggressive as it should have been, to keep up with these increases in imports and to effectively perform its mission.

This subcommittee responded by providing the CPSC with an \$80 million appropriation in fiscal year 2008, which was an increase of \$17 million, or 27.5 percent, over the year before. This is money well spent. The CPSC has started to replenish its staff and will be up to 444 full-time-equivalent staff by the end of the fiscal year. Many of these additional staff will help begin an Import Safety Initiative. This improvement in staff resources is just a start, as the Commission is still well below historical levels of staffing and we need to continue to make sure the Commission is well-equipped to its job.

The additional funds we provided will also modernize the CPSC's testing laboratory, which is antiquated and in dire need of upgrade. Information technology will also be improved so that the Commission will have the tools and databases to identify, track and take action to remove dangerous products from the marketplace and our homes.

We need to build on the progress we are making toward restoring the strength of this agency. The fiscal year 2009 budget request for the CPSC is the same as appropriated for this year -- \$80 million -- but it does include some programmatic increases because of several one-time expenses occurring in fiscal year 2008. These increases include the funding of 24 staff for the Import Safety Initiative, and I commend the Commission for continuing this effort.

I believe that there is much more to be done, however, and this subcommittee will work hard to ensure that the CPSC has the resources to meet its responsibilities. While the budget for this commission is relatively small, the commission's mission is essential.

I'm pleased to welcome Nancy Nord, the Acting Chairman of the CPSC, and Thomas Moore, a member of the Commission.

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Congressman José E. Serrano has represented the Bronx in Congress since 1990. He is the Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government, which oversees the budget of the Consumer Product Safety Commission.