

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Fortenberry, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here this morning. I appear before you today not only as a fellow Member of Congress, but as a father of three who must sound the alarm about the dangerous neurotoxins contained within the baby food brands we all know and thought we could trust.

A recent investigation by the House Oversight Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy, which I oversaw as Chairman, uncovered astonishingly high levels of lead, arsenic, cadmium, and mercury in many products made by the popular baby food brands Gerber, happyBABY, Hain, and Beech-Nut.

For example, some foods contain as much as 180 parts per billion of arsenic, 641 parts per billion of lead, and 345 parts per billion of cadmium, many, many times higher than the Food and Drug Administration's standards for drinking water, which are set at 10, 5, and 5 parts per billion, respectively. To our further shock, we learned that most companies rarely or never test for mercury, the environmental toxin posing the third-greatest threat to human health according to the CDC.

Several other major baby food brands – Walmart, Campbell, and Sprout Organic Foods – did not cooperate with my Subcommittee's investigation, leading me to the grim conclusion that the heavy metal contents of their foods could be even worse.

The consequences of consuming these toxic heavy metals in infancy and early childhood are significant and life-long. Children are at higher risk than adults because of their small size and their other developing organ systems. They can experience permanently decreased IQ, behavioral problems such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and central nervous system damage. These impacts may result in lower earnings and increased risk of criminal and antisocial behavior in adulthood. The impacts of toxic metal consumption are cumulative, so the more kids eat, the worse the impact. In very high quantities, consumption of these toxic heavy metals can even result in death.

The public reacted to the Subcommittee's findings with outrage and confusion. How could these brands, some of them generations-old American icons, allow their foods to *harm* babies? As a parent myself, I can assure you there is nothing more gut-wrenching than the knowledge that you may have caused your children harm, even unwittingly. Parents demanded action.

The Food and Drug Administration responded by launching the Closer to Zero program, which is aimed at reducing the content of lead, arsenic, cadmium, and mercury in baby food over the coming years. This long-overdue step is welcome, but it currently lacks the urgency needed to meet the need of protecting babies' brains. While the FDA has promised that Closer to Zero will lead to a draft lead standard within one year and a draft arsenic standard within three, its timeline for creating *draft* cadmium and mercury standards is delayed until "2024 to beyond." Furthermore, the FDA has not yet demonstrated a commitment to reducing toxic heavy metals to levels truly protective of children's neurodevelopment.

It is for this reason that I respectfully, yet urgently, ask you to include report language in the Fiscal Year 2022 appropriations bill providing \$10 million for the FDA's Closer to Zero program. It is imperative that the FDA prioritize this particular program and work as expeditiously as possible to remove toxic heavy metals from baby food.

10,000 American babies start on solid foods every day—so, there is absolutely no time to waste. We must ensure baby foods are truly safe to feed our kids, not just for the sake of our own children and grandchildren, but for the health of each future generation of Americans.

Thank you for hearing my testimony this morning. I encourage you to please reach out to me or my staff if you require any additional information on this topic, which we will gladly provide. I greatly look forward to passing an annual appropriations bill that will further ensure the health and well-being of our children. Nothing is more important.