

May 14, 2009

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – Today, U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) held a Congressional hearing to investigate whether a new consumer product safety law could inadvertently force many small business owners into bankruptcy. The Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act, which became law last year, aims to protect children from products that contain dangerously high levels of lead. In recent months, however, a growing number of small businesses have expressed concerns that some of the ways in which the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is implementing this law could force them out of business, without actually improving child safety.

“Following the recall of millions of lead contaminated toys, Congress enacted the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act to protect our children from hazardous products,” Altmire said. “Unfortunately, the Consumer Product Safety Commission’s failure to issue clear guidelines for this new law has left many small business owners scrambling to meet a host of costly testing and inventory requirements that may not actually make our children safer.”

Laurel Schreiber -- a small business owner from Allison Park, PA -- was one of several small business owners who testified at today’s hearing. Schreiber runs a business named Lucy’s Pocket in which she embroiders baby items, such as bibs and blankets, and sells them online. To cover the cost of the CPSIA’s lead and phthalate testing requirements for each of her products, Schreiber would have to increase her prices so much that it would be impossible for her to stay in business.

“It saddens me, terrifies me, and disheartens me that my ability to build a business creating safe items for children can be taken away by the unintended effects of the CPSIA,” Schreiber said. “I have young children and I am very aware of safety concerns relating to lead. That is why I am extremely conscientious about using safe products and creating safe items. Unfortunately, with the way the CPSIA is currently being implemented, it would be impossible for me to stay in business.”

Another problem highlighted at today’s hearing is the CPSC’s failure to expeditiously issue testing exemptions for products that do not pose a threat to consumers. This oversight has forced many businesses to unnecessarily pull goods off their shelves, hurting their bottom lines at a time when they are already struggling.

To ensure that it is keeping children safe without creating unnecessary burdens for small businesses, witnesses urged the CPSC to issue clearer testing guidelines, issue broader testing exemptions for non-harmful products, and conduct a comprehensive education and outreach program to help entrepreneurs manufacture and sell safer merchandise.

