

September 18, 2007

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman
Committee on Finance
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on Finance
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Grassley:

We are deeply concerned about the reports of widespread importation of children's toys that do not meet United States safety standards, in particular, toys which have too much lead paint or lead content. Consumers Union testified before the Senate Appropriations Committee last week on the need for more authority and resources to ensure the safety of imported toys. As you so well know, lead in toys can be associated with reduced mental and social development problems, and other health problems (including death) in children. As the policy statements of the American Academy of Pediatricians make so clear, the cost of excessive lead in our society runs into the tens of billions of dollars.

It is important, therefore, to minimize the introduction of lead into the environment of our nation's children. But we hope that the recent headlines about lead in imported toys could also be an opportunity to refocus on the problem of lead paint and other lead items in older homes occupied by millions of generally lower-income uninsured, Medicaid, and SCHIP eligible children. The children most at risk for daily, debilitating exposure to excessive lead levels are not the children who are most likely to be receiving new toys—and it is past time that the Nation also gave more attention to the daily poison that these children face.

In 1999, the U.S. Government Accountability Office gave Congress a report entitled "Lead Poisoning, Federal Health Care Programs Are Not Effectively Reaching At-Risk Children" [GAO/HEHS-99-18], which effectively described the widespread failure to actually screen or treat most of the high risk eligible children. Basically, only about 20%

of the most at risk children are ever screened or treated for excessive lead levels, despite the fact that this is a covered benefit under Medicaid.

As Congress acts to protect children against unsafe toys, we hope it can also rededicate attention and resources to the key underlying problem of excessive lead in at risk communities. We believe it would be very helpful if hearings could be held, not just on the newly reported problem of unsafe toys, but on the basic problem of ensuring lead screening and treatment for uninsured and Medicaid/SCHIP children.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

William Vaughan
Senior Policy Analyst
Consumers Union

Ron Pollack
Executive Director
Families USA