

Statement of Richard Trumka Jr.
Nominee, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
July 28, 2021

Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Wicker and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear here. I am grateful and honored to be nominated as a Commissioner at the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

I am here today because I believe that all people deserve to be protected from the dangers they can't see. Both of my grandfathers were proud coal miners. They worked hard every day. And like too many miners of their generation, they both died of black lung, a painful disease that they got from years of breathing in coal dust. It was a danger they couldn't see until it was too late.

I remember a conversation I had with my grandfather. I asked him about what career path I should take. He turned his experience into sage advice. He told me to get a good education, because no one can take that away from you. And he told me to use that education to try to protect people from the dangers they know, and the ones they can't see. To give them a voice.

That advice has always stuck with me. It's why I worked to protect people's retirement security while I was in private practice. And it's what drew me to the Consumer Protection Division of the Maryland Attorney General's Office. There, I was able to protect consumers. I remember speaking to one mother who hired a moving company that lured her in with a lowball quote and then held all her belongings hostage in an attempt to extract four times that amount. When she couldn't afford to pay, the moving company drove off with all of her possessions, including necessary medical devices for her disabled daughter. They slept on the cold floor that night because even their mattresses and blankets were on the moving truck. Fortunately, within days we were able to secure an injunction and get back her possessions. And then we worked to make things right for all the other people this company had victimized. I also worked on cybersecurity and privacy matters, including data breach cases of national scope, like the Equifax data breach. In those cases, the offices of many attorneys general teamed up to conduct "multistate investigations." Those investigations allowed me to work with colleagues in states across the political spectrum, and demonstrated that consumer protection is not partisan – we all want to keep consumers safe.

The desire to protect people from harms, seen and unseen, is also why I came to the House Oversight Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy. It was clear from my first conversation with Chairman Raja Krishnamoorthi that he was passionate about the same ideals. And together, we have worked to address some significant consumer product safety issues. We have focused much of our attention on products that hurt children. As a father of two young kids, the issues are close to home for me. Earlier this year, the Subcommittee issued a staff report revealing that many baby foods contained high levels of toxic heavy metals like arsenic, lead, cadmium, and mercury. These are unseen dangers to infant neurological development. It's beyond encouraging that the Food and Drug Administration has since taken up the issue as a Commissioner-level priority, creating the "Closer to Zero" Action Plan. Closer to Zero's goal is

to reduce the levels of these neurotoxins in baby foods to the lowest levels possible, and FDA has issued timelines for setting maximum limits. The Subcommittee also published a staff report on children's car booster seats and the risk that they pose to children who are placed in them prematurely. There is a long-standing consensus, among the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and other experts, that car booster seats are unsafe for children under 40 pounds. Despite that, many products were still being marketed as safe for children as light as 30 pounds, which presented a very serious risk of injury. After the Subcommittee's investigation, all of the manufacturers that we communicated with have since voluntarily moved to a 40-pound standard.

I have also investigated: the youth vaping epidemic; the presence of carcinogenic asbestos in products like Johnson and Johnson's talc Baby Powder, which has since been discontinued; and pet products that have allegedly caused harm to not only dogs and cats, but also to the children that play with them.

When I told my wife and kids that President Biden had nominated me to be a Commissioner on the Consumer Product Safety Commission, they were thrilled. My son, who is about to turn five, said: "Dad, I'm so excited." And after a short pause, he added, "...but I don't know what that means." It was the perfect opportunity to share my grandfather's wisdom with my young son. And I told him it means that his dad will get to work every day protecting people from the dangers they don't see coming. I ask that you give me that opportunity.

Thank you.