



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the Senate Finance Committee

Chair: Senator Pamela Beidle

February 28, 2024

Senate Bill 0723 Baby Food - Toxic Heavy Metals - Testing and Labeling

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 0723: Baby Food – Toxic Heavy Metals – Testing and Labeling.

Nutrition is an essential component for ensuring the proper development of infants and children. To support a child's physical and emotional development, we need to ensure that the foods we feed them are not only nutritious but also are able to meet the needs of standard body demands. To do so, we need to ensure that we are giving our children enough foods with healthy ingredients to fuel their bodies. Additionally, while we need to make sure certain ingredients are present in the food we give our children; we also need to make sure that harmful toxins are absent. In 2021, the Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy under the Committee on Oversight and Reform conducted a study on the presence of toxic heavy metals in baby food. In their report, they studied 4 of the most prominent baby food manufactures in the country. In their findings, they found toxic levels of arsenic, lead, cadmium, and mercury to be present across all manufactures. After further looking into the manufactures' policies, they are only required to test individual ingredients for heavy metals and not the final product. The report compared the level of toxic heavy metals found in each ingredient and then the final jarred product, and the difference was startling (2021). A key takeaway from this report is the recognition that current protocol for testing the levels of heavy toxic metals is insufficient. To correct this inadequacy, the report on behalf of the committee recommended mandatory testing and including a report of levels of heavy metals on the food label. The enactment of Senate Bill 0723 will accomplish the recommended changes in practice provided by the committee report. When children are chronically exposed to heavy toxic metals it can impair neurological function, delay child development, and puts the child at a higher risk for cancer, learning disabilities, and reduced intelligence levels. Furthermore, the nutrition a child receives in the first three years of their life is arguably the most critical as it can set the tone for development into adulthood and can determine risk for developing chronic diseases across the lifespan. It also plays a large role in lowering morbidity and mortality as well (World Health Organization, n.d.). Bettering the protection of the children of Maryland does not only require improved testing, but also proper education to the public. Requiring the inclusion of heavy metal levels on food labels, parents can make informed decisions on how to best feed their child. Improving the quality of baby food will have lasting benefits for the children of today that will follow them into adulthood. It also has the ability to lower the prevalence and incidence of chronic conditions in all Maryland residents, improving the overall health of the State. With these reasons, the Maryland Rural Health Association is in favor of Senate Bill 0723: Baby Food - Toxic Heavy Metals - Testing and Labeling.

*On behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,
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Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy & Committee on Oversight and Reform. (2021). *Baby foods are tainted with dangerous levels of arsenic, lead, cadmium, and mercury*. U.S. House of Representatives. <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2021-02-04%20ECP%20Baby%20Food%20Staff%20Report.pdf>

World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Infant nutrition*. https://www.who.int/health-topics/infant-nutrition#tab=tab_1