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Health and Government Operations
Chair Joseline Peña-Melnyk
Room 241
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Thank you, Chair Peña-Melnyk, and committee members. I am here to ask for your favorable report on HB97- Toxic Heavy Metals and Testing and Labeling.

My name is Sarah Callahan, and together with my husband, Ricky and son Rudy are lifelong residents of Maryland, representing a broad geographic footprint that spans from Prince George's to Baltimore and Harford Counties, with our current residence in Calvert County since 2012. Our son, Rudy, was born in 2022, in Anne Arundel County, a healthy and joyful addition to our family.

When Rudy was 6 months old, we began exploring various baby food options and discovered the WanaBana Apple Cinnamon pouches. Unfortunately, it was during Rudy's one-year checkup that our lives took an unexpected turn. Following the appointment, we were contacted by the Department of Health, alerting us to Rudy's alarmingly high blood lead levels. This initiated a comprehensive investigation into potential lead sources in our home, daycare, and daily environment, all of which yielded negative results, leaving us anxious about the safety of our surroundings.

The mystery of Rudy's lead exposure persisted until a friend brought to our attention a recall notice from the FDA concerning the very product Rudy had been consuming as a regular part of his diet - the WanaBana Apple Cinnamon pouch. Upon checking the lot number of a pouch we had, it matched those recalled for lead contamination. This discovery was a harrowing confirmation of the source of Rudy's lead poisoning.

In response to this terrifying ordeal, Ricky and I took immediate action by enrolling Rudy in the Calvert County Infants and Toddlers Program, focusing on early intervention to

monitor and support his developmental milestones, aiming to mitigate the long-term effects of lead poisoning.

This experience has made us staunch advocates for more rigorous testing and transparency in the baby food industry. The simple act of shopping for what we believed was a healthy, safe option for our son led to an unforeseen health crisis. The current labeling and safety assurances are insufficient. Parents, armed with comprehensive information on toxin levels in baby food, could avoid the anguish and health risks we have faced.

We urge for the implementation of mandatory testing and clear labeling of toxin levels in all baby food products. Such measures would empower parents with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions, safeguarding the health and well-being of their children. Our ordeal with Rudy's lead poisoning, while deeply personal, underscores a universal need for transparency and safety in the food we trust to nourish our youngest and most vulnerable.

Our family's journey through this challenging time has shown us the critical importance of informed choices. By sharing our story, we hope to highlight the need for significant changes in how baby food safety is regulated and communicated. We stand in strong support of HB97 that will prevent other families from enduring a similar, preventable tragedy.

In closing, as such I ask this esteemed committee for your favorable report on HB97.



Sarah Callahan



Ricky Callahan