

Opening Statement of Elliot F. Kaye
Nominee for Chairman of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission
April 8, 2014

Good Afternoon, Chairman Rockefeller, Ranking Member Thune and the distinguished members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as the nominee for Chairman of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

I would like to begin by introducing two members of my family. My wife, Kanae, is Country Officer for Haiti at the World Bank. She inspires me every day, from her unequaled skill as a parent to her deep and abiding commitment to helping people in need, especially in strife-ridden countries. Sitting next to Kanae is our nine-year-old son, Noah. We were not able to bring our four-year-old son, Ethan, whose level of energy is not exactly compatible with this setting.

I love Kanae, Noah and Ethan as much as is humanly possible. I am a far better person because of them.

I would like to congratulate Joe Mohorovic on his nomination and look forward to serving with him on the Commission, if confirmed. I would also like to express my gratitude for the support of Acting Chairman Bob Adler and Commissioners Marietta Robinson and Ann Marie Buerkle. And, I am deeply moved by the support of so many CPSC staff, especially DeWane Ray, Jay Howell, Michelle Ziemer, and Sydney Lucia from my office.

Though my family was in the textile business, I chose public service as my path. My career was born, so to speak, in January of 1993, when I started as an unpaid intern on the Hill. But my career matured years later, when I went to work for Congressman John Tierney. By the time I left the Congressman's office, I had learned from him what a tremendous force for good government can be, especially when it serves to bring people together from many different viewpoints to solve problems. I am a far more effective and well-rounded public servant because of John Tierney. Congressman Tierney, thank you for your very kind words of support today.

After law school and a year in private practice, I had the great fortune to clerk for U.S. District Court Judge Sterling Johnson. I learned from him the art of reading people and situations. I also learned the power of not taking oneself too seriously. I have far better perspective because of Judge Johnson.

I also struck gold a few years ago when I was hired by then CPSC Chairman Inez Tenenbaum. From her, I learned about combining great leadership with great compassion. Because of her, I have a much greater understanding of the relationship between effectively leading a large group of people and truly connecting with them as individuals. And, in large part because of her efforts, I sit before you today. Chairman Tenenbaum, thank you for making a special trip to be here today.

The CPSC is a very special place to work. We like to say that we are a tiny agency with a giant mission. Consumer product related deaths and injuries are not just numbers to us – they are the people whose stories motivate us to be even better at what we do.

They are people like the young brothers from Kimball, Minnesota who were poisoned by carbon monoxide from a furnace.

They are an 81-year-old woman, who died after becoming entrapped in a bed rail at her assisted living home in Vancouver, Washington.

And they are the little boy who recently died when he became entangled in a window blind cord in nearby North Bethesda. The boy's mom was quoted in the media saying that she found a tiny handprint on the window near where he got caught.

As it should, that image haunts me. And, as it should, that image drives me.

It drives me to solve safety problems. My track record at the Commission has been to reach out to a wide coalition of stakeholders to try to find meaningful safety solutions through collaboration. I have done this with football helmet manufacturers and representatives from the NFL down to youth football on trying to reduce the risk of brain injury. Brain safety in youth sports would be a top priority, if confirmed as Chairman. And I have done this with the major battery manufacturers in trying to address the life-threatening chemical burn hazard to children who swallow coin cell batteries.

There are times, though, when the agency needs to employ all of the tools Congress has provided us. If confirmed, I would continue the thoughtful and deliberative approach I have taken during my time at CPSC.

We have significant safety challenges facing us. New and unique hazards continue to emerge. Hidden hazards persist in causing injuries and deaths. These hazards can be addressed and, if confirmed, I would very much look forward to working with my fellow Commissioners, the wonderful CPSC staff, and our stakeholders to do so.

We also face challenges in identifying noncompliant products at the ports. In the CPSIA, Congress directed us to begin a risk assessment methodology to better target hazardous and violative imports. We have been running a successful pilot of that program and now are requesting a funding mechanism to run a full scale version. Consumers are better served by us catching these products before they enter our markets, and compliant trade is better served by us focusing on those companies not following the rules.

If confirmed, I would very much look forward to working with the members of this Committee on expanding our import safety program, as well as on other safety priorities. I would also look forward to working with members of this Committee on ways the Commission can continue to seek to reduce costs of third party testing while still assuring children's products are compliant.

And, if confirmed, it would be an honor to lead the outstanding and dedicated staff at CPSC and build upon the great successes they have achieved in recent years.

Thank you again Chairman Rockefeller, Ranking Member Thune and the members of this Committee. I look forward to answering your questions.