



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, January 14, 2010

CONTACT:

BEN GROSSMAN-COHEN, 202-478-6185
BGROSSMAN-COHEN@MRSS.COM

Or

PAULA CHRIN DIBLEY, 202-478-6138
PCHRIN@MRSS.COM

***Salmonella* victims press lawmakers to keep promise of reform**

A year after outbreak of contaminated peanut products, Congress has yet to pass food-safety legislation

WASHINGTON, D.C. –Victims and families of those who were sickened and in some cases died due to an early 2009 foodborne-illness outbreak are calling on congressional lawmakers to keep their promise to implement food-safety reform.

The group representing 27 victims who fell ill as a result of contaminated peanut products is seeking a Senate floor vote on legislation that would boost the food-safety authority under the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and help limit future outbreaks.

“Americans cannot afford to wait for another outbreak for Congress to pass food-safety legislation that protects families from facing the same hardships we have faced,” said Jill Summers, the mother of Makayla Stephens, a victim from Quapaw, Oklahoma. “It took over a month after Makayla first got sick for there to even be a recall on the products. No one in America should have to worry whether the food they eat and feed their families will make them sick.”

The January 14 letter from the victims and family members from 22 states notes the need for a strong, comprehensive food-safety reform law. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), peanut butter and peanut paste contaminated with *Salmonella* Typhimurium resulted in nine deaths and over 700 illnesses in 46 states, with many more cases never reported to CDC. Thousands of items – including cookies, crackers, candy, and ice cream – that contained Peanut Corporation of America (PCA) peanut products were eventually recalled.

The letter was sent exactly one year to the day after a major announcement in which The Kellogg Company put a hold on two popular brands of peanut butter crackers because of potential contamination. This action came two days after Minnesota state officials confirmed a genetic match between the strains of *Salmonella* bacteria found in a container of King Nut brand creamy peanut butter and those associated with 30 illnesses in Minnesota and nearly 400 illnesses around the country.

-MORE-

President Barack Obama and leaders from both parties in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate have called for action on food safety, and according to a poll commissioned by The Pew Charitable Trusts, nine out of 10 Americans favor legislation to strengthen our food-safety laws.

The bills in Congress, which would establish minimum inspection frequencies, require that food processors establish food safety plans, and grant FDA mandatory recall authority, would shift the agency's regulatory approach from reaction to prevention.

Had these provisions been in place before the peanut product outbreak, the company would have been required to develop a food safety plan, which would have identified the risks of contamination and implemented steps to minimize them. Moreover, FDA would have been inspecting the plant on a regular basis and should have discovered and required remediation of some of the unsanitary conditions at the plant that were all too apparent after the incident, such as a leaky roof, rodent droppings and unclean surfaces.

The House passed a strong food-safety bill (H.R. 2749) last July by a wide majority and to great acclaim from both parties. Consumer, public health, and victim advocacy groups, as well as food industry trade associations, strongly supported the bill.

The Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee approved a bipartisan bill (S. 510) in November 2009. The victims and their families are urging congressional lawmakers to contact Senate leadership and ask that S. 510 be scheduled for a floor vote, finalized by a conference committee, and presented to the president for signature before Valentine's Day, February 14.

“Strong, comprehensive FDA reform legislation is long overdue. The Senate needs to act now to ensure FDA puts measures in place to spare more families the pain and suffering like what occurred in the PCA outbreak. This massive outbreak and recall touched the lives of nearly every American a year ago. But, with care, foresight and effective FDA regulation, future outbreaks can and must be prevented,” says Donna Rosenbaum, executive director of S.T.O.P.- Safe Tables Our Priority, a coalition member.

To obtain a copy of the letter, visit www.makeourfoodsafef.org

Major public health, consumer and food safety groups have launched the Make Our Food Safe coalition (www.makeourfoodsafef.org), including the American Public Health Association, Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention, Center for Science in the Public Interest, the Consumer Federation of America, Consumers Union, Food & Water Watch, National Consumers League, The Pew Charitable Trusts, Safe Tables Our Priority, and Trust for America's Health.

###