



News from Frank Pallone, Jr.

New Jersey Congressman, Sixth District



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CONTACT: Andrew Souvall
Tali Israeli
(202) 225-4671

PALLONE STATEMENT AT HEALTH HEARING: HOW DO WE FIX OUR AILING FOOD SAFETY SYSTEM?

Washington, D.C. --- U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ), Chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health, gave the following opening statement this morning at a subcommittee hearing entitled: How Do We Fix Our Ailing Food Safety System."

"Good morning. Today the Subcommittee is meeting to discuss the topic of food safety. Unfortunately, news of unsafe food products has continued to make front page headlines. The outbreak of e-coli in spinach a few years ago; the outbreak of salmonella in peppers this past summer; and the most recent outbreak of salmonella in peanut butter all emphasize that now is the time for us to act. Nine people have died as a result of this most recent peanut butter outbreak; hundreds more have gotten sick; and millions of dollars have been lost in sales due to products being recalled.

Food safety, or perhaps more accurately, the lack thereof, continues to be one of my top priorities. In every Congress for the last 12 years, I have introduced food safety legislation that aims to bolster the FDA's enforcement and regulatory authority over the food industry.

"This year, I have collaborated with my colleagues Mr. Dingell and Mr. Stupak to introduce a comprehensive FDA reform bill. Many of the food provisions within the FDA Globalization Act build upon concepts and provisions I have put forth in my previous bills. They emphasize prevention and shifting the responsibility of safe food from the FDA to the manufacturers.

"What it all comes down to is that it is not the government's duty to make food safe. The companies should be responsible for the products they make and must be held accountable for that responsibility. It is their job to make their food safe and to implement a plan that will ensure they achieve that goal.

"It is the government's job, on the other hand, to set standards for food safety and hold the food industry accountable for meeting those standards through regulatory and enforcement authorities. We must empower the FDA with those authorities, so that the agency can effectively prevent problems from ever occurring, rather than simply reacting once something bad has happened. And we must require manufacturers to put in place the food safety plans to ensure that their products and production lines are safe.

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"But there are other mechanisms aside from food safety plans that companies can implement to ensure the safety of their products. And we will hear testimony this morning from industry experts on the various safety mechanisms companies can implement in order to protect their production lines and keep our nation's food supply safe.

"We will also hear about some of the regulatory authorities that the FDA needs in order to ensure that companies are actually implementing and following these preventive mechanisms. And finally, we will hear from witnesses about the enforcement tools the FDA needs to fulfill its mission of protecting the public health and protecting Americans from harmful products, both in the US and abroad.

"I look forward to our discussion today and the information we will glean from this hearing. This information will be vital as we move towards passing food safety legislation this year.

"I would like to thank the witnesses for appearing before us today to share their expertise and I now recognize my colleague from Georgia, Mr. Deal, for three minutes for his opening statement."