Michele Witte
129 Commonwealth Avenue, Merrick, New York 11566
michelewitte@gmail.com

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RE: Committee on Oversight and Government Reform: Testimony for Consideration

Dear Committee Members:

When I woke up on the morning of December 12th 1997, I found my son, Tyler Jonathan, with his neck caught between the side rail and headboard of his drop side crib. Sometime after his one am bottle, a single screw became loose creating a gap wide enough to entrap his neck. When this happened, the side of his crib became a spring-loaded vice, strangling him to death instantly. The very last image I have of my precious son is that of him trapped and killed by a crib that I thought was his one and only safe haven.

For years after Tyler's death, I could walk into a store and see the same crib that strangled my Tyler on a sales floor advertised as #1 in safety. On one such occasion I asked the sales representative if that particular crib had ever caused injury or death to a child. She responded: "No, of course not. We couldn't sell it if it did" and proceeded to point to the JPMA seal of approval. This enraged me. Who is protecting the consumer? When my mother first announced that she wanted to buy a crib for her first grandchild I was so excited. We went from store to store searching for the perfect crib. My mother spent hundreds of dollars on a very pretty crib that matched the paint in my nursery and had the convenience of a side that lowered. I am not very tall. When we decided on that particular crib I falsely believed that I was making an informed decision to purchase a safe crib that looked pretty and was convenient. If I knew that the crib I purchased suffocated and strangled babies in the middle of the night I would NOT have purchased the death trap that is responsible for the death of my Tyler. Shortly after losing "My Valentine" I turned to The Danny Foundation and tried to raise awareness about the dangers of drop side cribs. A few years later I stumbled upon a review on Epinions.com. The review was of a Child Craft crib by a mother named April. Her daughter, Amaya, was also killed when hardware failed on her crib. She used Epinions to share her story. Reading about Amaya encouraged me to launch the website America's Most Unwanted. My goal was to educate parents and caregivers about unsafe child products so that we can save lives "One Story at a

Time." The website received very few "hits" and my son's story was of little interest to the media so I gave up. Until I read a story about a little boy named Bobby Cirigliano in my local newspaper. Bobby died in his drop side crib when hardware failed and he suffocated. The Ciriglianos live a few miles away from me. How I cried when I saw a photo of Bobby in his little JETS T-shirt realizing that my son's story hasn't even reached my neighbors, let alone families across America. I decided to send a letter to Bobby's parents. Bobby's parents were both shocked and horrified that other children died the same way as Tyler and Bobby. That's when I started googling. I'd find small local stories about babies killed by drop side cribs. This is what the World Wide Web told me:

1. Liam Johns, Citrus Heights, California, died 2005 in his drop side crib

2. Reese Morgan, New Iberia, Louisiana, died 2009 in his drop side crib

3. Emrys Taylor, Cedar Rapids,Iowa, died 2008 in his drop side crib

4. Courtney Sue Barr, Guevernere,NY,died 2007 in her drop side crib

5. Carter Michael Pack, Summersville, West Virginia, died 2007 in his drop side crib

6. Edward Millwood,Woodstock, Georgia, died 2006 in his drop side crib

7. Serenity Bergey, West Palm Beach,Florida, died 2007 in her drop side crib

8. Royale Arceneaux, Houston,Texas, died 2008 in his drop side crib

9. Ariele Allison, Princeton, Kentucky, died 2009 in her drop side crib

Does the CPSC know about these children? I really don't know. Although I requested (and received…thank you) copies of children killed by drop side cribs from your agency via the FOIA, names are excluded to protect a family's privacy, leaving me in a quandary. I was equally as confused when I spoke with a mom last year who lost her son in a relabeled Simplicity crib. She did not report the death to the CPSC because her father-in-law assembled the crib and she was worried that he may face legal charges if he assembled it inaccurately. I don't blame her since

manufacturers have been blaming parents for years. I, myself, was told that my son's death was my fault since I did not follow a warning, placed underneath the mattress that read "Check for loose hardware each time you use the crib." At one AM my only concerns were keeping the house quiet and dark while I warmed a bottle and changed Tyler's diaper. Give consumers like me a database on which to turn. From hair salons to car reviews to diapers to yogurt, consumers have access to reviews of products. I continue to urge my legislatures to consider proposing legislation that would require mandatory reporting laws designed to keep our babies safe from harm. I strongly believe that the CPSC needs legislatures to pass laws that require police departments, coroners and / or hospitals to report to the CPSC any death or injury of a child caused by a consumer product intended for child safety. Currently, the CPSC must rely on reports from parents or manufacturers. We must be honest. Parents are devastated after the loss of a child. Children prepare to one day bury their parents but it goes against the very simple laws of nature to bury a child. And what exactly are the repercussions of manufacturers failing to report to the CPSC? Unless and until mandatory reporting laws are in effect in this country, a public database is the only way consumers can learn from other consumers the experiences a parent has had with a product. Let us review products that hold the lives of our children in its reliability, performance and reputation. The database can help consumers keep babies safe "One Story at a Time." Priceless.

Thank you for reading,

Michele Witte