

**Testimony of
Ms. B. Belinda Collins, Director
Denver District
Food and Drug Administration**

I am the Director of the Denver District Office of the Food and Drug Administration, which includes the Denver District Laboratory. I have been responsible for the operations of this office for over five years.

I would like this Committee to know that the Denver District employees are dedicated to the public health mission of this agency, for the good of all American consumers.

The work we do for the agency begins when our investigators conduct inspections of regulated industry to determine their compliance with the regulations we enforce. The Denver District Investigations Branch has been operating with approximately 50% of the investigators needed to meet the performance goals mandated by the Agency.

Despite that diminished staffing, Denver District has consistently met and even exceeded those goals, based on their employees' determination and dedication. They have worked tirelessly to get the job done. They put their personal lives in abeyance to respond to national emergencies such as the recent findings of melamine in pet food.

During the melamine emergency, Denver District's Animal Drug Research Center (ADRC) developed a scientific method for detecting the presence of melamine and its analogs in animal tissue. Within 72 hours from the start of that process, the method was validated and shared with other FDA and private laboratories, and was distributed internationally. This technology was not available prior to its development in the Denver District.

Mr. Chairman, I am very proud to be working with this very dedicated and talented staff of investigators, scientists and managers. As part of the proposed FDA reorganization, the Denver District Office is scheduled to merge with the Kansas City District on October 1 of this year. This reorganization will affect employees who work in the Investigations Branch, Laboratory Branch, and those in my immediate office, and will include the reassignment of job functions.

The next milestone in the reorganization will be the closure of the Denver District Laboratory. The approximately 50 employees of the laboratory have told me that they will not leave the Denver area. The loss of the laboratory staff will result in a significant shortage of expertise and skill. The same can be said for the other district employees who will be reassigned to other positions. The result of such a reorganization will result in a brain drain within the FDA field organization.

The work that the Denver District Laboratory does cannot be successfully accomplished with novice employees who will be hired to replace our scientists, as has been proposed. It is important to note that it takes a minimum of three years to for an analyst or investigator to become trained to conduct the complex work that we do. At a time when our baby boomers are retiring from federal service in record numbers, it would be a travesty to lose the institutional knowledge of the seasoned and experienced field staff members.

The Denver Laboratory is a “Go To” lab in this agency. We are efficient, cost effective and scientifically solid. We were the leader in laboratory accreditation for FDA laboratories. Once accredited, the Denver District Laboratory served as the “gold standard” of accreditation for all other laboratories in the Agency.

I am confident that without the Denver laboratory, the food we eat as well as the human and animal drugs we use would be much less safe.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Committee Members.