

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 29, 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write to urge you to refrain from proposing a rule that would increase line speeds in poultry plants throughout the United States. Any attempt to increase line speeds to the industry-preferred 175 birds per minute (bpm), or roughly 3 birds per second, would have serious detrimental effects to food, worker, and animal safety.

When the U.S. Department of Agriculture first proposed modernizing the poultry slaughter inspection system in 2014, the agency opted against increasing line speeds in poultry facilities from 140 bpm to 175 bpm due to the overwhelming volume of feedback from experts and worker organizations. Organizations, such as the National Employment Law Project (NELP) and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), delineated the deleterious effects increased speeds can have on the health and safety of poultry workers and consumers. Without factoring in a potential increase to line speeds, the poultry industry is dangerous enough with the existing line speed. A combination of already break neck line speeds, use of knives and scissors when workers stand shoulder to shoulder, deafening noise levels, and slippery conditions all contribute to high levels of preventable work related injuries.

According the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, poultry workers face unsafe work environments and steep injury rates at almost fifty-percent above the national average. Additionally, workers in poultry plants become ill at rates seven times higher than all other industries. Further, of all industries in the nation, the poultry industry has the twelfth highest number of work related amputations and hospitalizations—numbers higher than those seen in the saw mill industry and construction. Couple these issues with a known history of systematic underreporting of work-related injuries and illnesses in the poultry industry, we feel strongly that increasing the line speeds will further exacerbate the already unsafe conditions poultry workers face.


To date, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has not done its due diligence in evaluating the safety of existing poultry plant line speeds. For example, when publishing the New Poultry Inspection System final rule, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that poultry plants enrolled in the pilot program had average line speeds of 131 bpm—far below the 175 bpm currently being promoted for industry to adopt. Despite the 131 bpm line speed in the pilot program, the agency recognized the dangers of higher line speeds to workers and noted that more studies would be needed before any increases would be made. Since the U.S. Department of

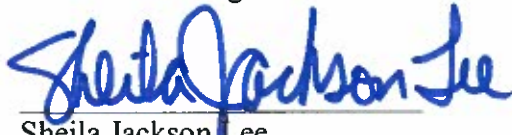
Agriculture has not completed any studies to this effect, we feel it is thoughtless and unsafe to pursue any changes to line speeds.


It is our hope that you will take these safety concerns seriously and reject the industry's request to increase poultry plant line speeds. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has heard from the American public and the evidence is clear: any increase to line speeds would have serious negative consequences to the health of the workers who put food on America's tables. Thank you for your attention to this pressing matter and I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,


Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress


Mark Pocan
Member of Congress


Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

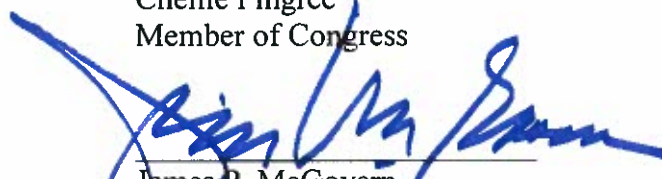

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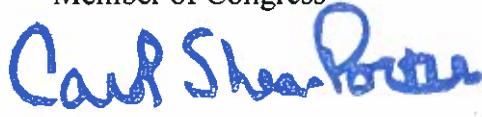

Bennie G. Thompson
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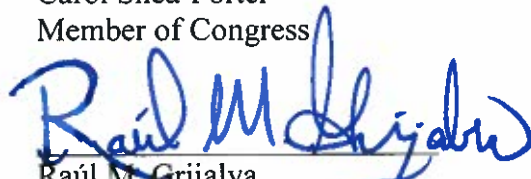

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