

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-1304**

May 8, 2020

Loren Sweatt  
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Labor  
Occupational Safety & Health Administration  
200 Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 21210

Dear Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Sweatt:

We write with deep concerns about the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA)'s ability to protect workers in the Chicagoland area, Illinois, and the country in light of President Trump's executive order granting the Secretary of Agriculture authority to reopen meat and poultry processing plants. Not only are our constituents afraid to return to work as cases of COVID-19 grow quickly, but workers returning from unsafe job sites present a serious public health hazard to our entire community. I urge you to fulfill OSHA's unique role in confronting this pandemic by ensuring that employers provide their workers with proper protections.

Last week on a call with Members of Congress Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar said that workers' "home and social" lives were to blame for the spread of the virus. The Secretary's implication is alarming and offensive, and does not address the fact that the virus is being spread *at work*.

The meat and poultry processing industry is characterized by close quarters and fast-paced work, and it leaves employees particularly susceptible to the virus. Workers' apprehensions are borne out by the news reports we see every day: nearly 60% of employees at a meat processing plant in Iowa contracted COVID-19; nearly 400 workers at a Missouri plant were found to have the virus despite not having symptoms; At least 145 USDA inspectors are infected and at least three have died of the disease.

Workers here in Illinois have reason to be concerned. Before President Trump's executive order, Smithfield planned to close two facilities in our state after employees tested positive for COVID-19. Just this week state officials are identifying new cases connected to Rantoul Foods. Workers in our state have informed us that they are required to work in close proximity to one another and frequently do not have access to PPE and disinfectant. When there is PPE available, employers have required workers to reuse disposable equipment for several shifts. These conditions put workers' lives at risk and exacerbate the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

Before bringing employees back to work, every employer should be required to guarantee necessary protections for their workers. These include access to daily testing; hazard pay;

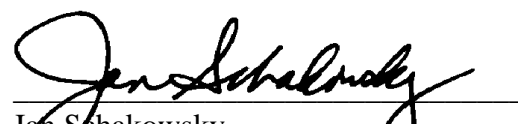
sufficient paid time off to self-quarantine for any employee exposed to the virus regardless of whether they show symptoms; personal protective equipment (PPE) including masks, gloves and hand sanitizer; and work protocols that allow for physical distancing. To ensure that OSHA is doing its part to fight this pandemic, please provide the following information:

- How is OSHA coordinating with the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service to ensure that meat and poultry workers are safe on the job?
- How is OSHA coordinating with the Centers for Disease Control to ensure that all essential workers have access to regular testing, and that testing capacities expand as new industries come on line?
- How will OSHA hold employers accountable for creating work plans that maximize physical distance between employees, even if it means slowing down or limiting operations? How does OSHA ensure that these new work plans are implemented?
- When will OSHA issue mandatory guidance to make sure that employers provide testing, hazard pay, paid time off quarantine and PPE?

If new outbreaks of COVID-19 spread across dangerous workplaces as soon as they reopen, the sacrifices that people in Illinois and across the country have made to fight this virus will have been for nothing. We urge OSHA to fulfill its mission and help mitigate the spread of this pandemic. We look forward to your response to our questions by May 22.

Sincerely,

  
Jesús G. "Chuy" García  
Member of Congress

  
Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress

Co-signers:

Bobby L. Rush, Member of Congress  
Bill Foster, Member of Congress  
Danny K. Davis, Member of Congress  
Raja Krishnamoorthi, Member of Congress

cc: J.B. Pritzker, Governor of Illinois