

November 19, 2013

Co-Chairs

Michael D. Jones
Donald J. Rosenberg

Secretary

Eleanor H. Smith

Treasurer

Andrew W. Kentz

General Counsel

Nicholas T. Christakos

President & Executive Director

Barbara R. Arnwine

FSIS Docket Clerk
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Service
Room 2534, South Building
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

RE: Docket # 13-05

Dear Assistant Secretary Tom Vilsack:

We are writing to support the rulemaking petition submitted on September 3, 2013 by the Southern Poverty Law Center and 14 other organizations on the need for USDA to address excessive line speeds in poultry and meatpacking plants. As a Civil Rights organization we are deeply concerned with the impact of line speeds on the health and safety of poultry processing workers in the United States.

Established in 1963 at the request of President John F. Kennedy, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyers' Committee) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that harnesses the resources of the private bar in providing legal services to combat racial discrimination. The mission of the Lawyers' Committee is to secure, through the rule of law, equal justice under law by using the skills and resources of the bar to address matters of racial justice and economic opportunity. As a national leader in combating employment discrimination, the Lawyers' Committee has placed a priority on upholding fair labor practices. As part of our Immigrant Rights Initiative and the Delmarva Migrant Justice Program we have become aware of the strenuous working conditions and the health consequences that poultry workers experience as a result of line speed at poultry processing plants.

Poultry processing is among the most dangerous industries for workers. The physical labor often results musculoskeletal disorders, which are disorders that cause pain to a person's muscles, bones, ligaments, and tendons. Poultry processing workers particularly suffer from hand and wrist pain due to the repetitive motions involved in processing birds that move at high speeds. While hand and wrist injuries are most prevalent, workers are also at risk for

cuts, amputations, and crush injuries due to the nature of poultry processing. These injuries make both work related and everyday activities much more difficult.

Co-Chairs

Michael D. Jones
Donald J. Rosenberg

Secretary

Eleanor H. Smith

Treasurer

Andrew W. Kentz

General Counsel

Nicholas T. Christakos

President & Executive Director

Barbara R. Arnwine

Although musculoskeletal disorders are the most common injuries suffered by poultry processing workers, increased line speeds will also cause other ailments. The USDA proposed rule Modernization of Poultry Slaughter Inspection, 77 Fed. Reg. 4408 (proposed January 27, 2012), subjecting all birds to reprocessing involving chemical sprays, admits that workers will be unable to properly clean the birds as they move down the processing line. Reprocessing every bird will result in much greater worker exposure to chemicals. In plants that use increased line speeds, workers have already complained of ailments that can be attributable to exposure to chemicals, including skin irritations, asthma, and sinus ulcers. An OSHA report of poultry processing plants concluded that chemical exposure was the likely cause of worker ailments.

A rule limiting poultry processing speed should be adopted in order to adequately protect workers and the general public. Workers are unnecessarily forced to perform constant, repetitive motions at excessive speeds that result in injuries. The injuries will become more prevalent and exacerbated if processing lines are increased. Limiting line speeds is also necessary to reduce risky exposure of workers to chemicals. The Lawyers' Committee urges the USDA to work with OSHA to develop standards that will ensure worker safety is strengthened. We look forward to working with you to accomplish this goal. If you have any additional questions, feel free to contact me at tclayhouse@lawyerscommittee.org, (202) 662-8330.

Sincerely,



Tanya Clay House
Director of Public Policy
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law