

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 20, 2014

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

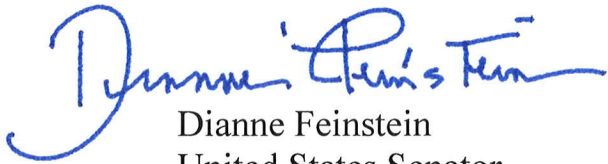
We write to again urge the Department to publish pathogen standards for *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* in poultry products that will reduce rates of foodborne illness as quickly as possible. In response to an earlier letter, you committed to moving forward with pathogen standards by the end of the fiscal year, which was September 30th. However, these standards have not yet been proposed. Today, the Government Accountability Office released a report that finds the Department's current policies for controlling these pathogens in poultry products are ineffective and outdated. It is our belief that new, strong pathogen standards must be established to reduce the number of foodborne illnesses and deaths attributed to poultry products.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* cause nearly two million foodborne illnesses, 27,500 hospitalizations, and over 450 deaths each year. It is even more troubling that the CDC reports our food safety system has not reduced the number of illnesses caused by *Salmonella* since 2000. Furthermore, the CDC found that as of 2013, *Campylobacter* illnesses have increased by 13 percent compared with the baseline number of annual illnesses that occurred between 2006 and 2008.

These alarming rates of foodborne illness are caused, in part, by the unacceptably high levels of *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* contamination on poultry products. Routine testing done in 2013 by the Department found that over 40 percent of ground chicken tested positive for *Salmonella*. A national study completed by the Department in 2012 found that 26 percent of poultry parts tested positive for *Salmonella* and 21 percent tested positive for *Campylobacter*. As of today, there are no standards for poultry parts and the standards for ground poultry have not been updated since 1996.

Thank you for your attention to our request on this important public health matter. We eagerly await the release of new *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* standards for poultry products.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Dianne Feinstein in blue ink.

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Richard J. Durbin in blue ink.

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Kirsten Gillibrand in blue ink.

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

DF/tc