



Consumer Federation of America

October 7, 2011

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Gillibrand:

Consumer Federation of America is pleased to support the Safe Meat and Poultry Act (S. 1529) which will strengthen the authority of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) to better assure the safety of meat and poultry products and protect consumers from foodborne illness.

Foodborne illness from meat and poultry products remains a serious public health problem. A recent report by the University of Florida found that a significant proportion of the foodborne disease burden in the United States can be attributed to pathogens associated with meat and poultry products. Recent outbreaks linked to antibiotic resistant strains of *Salmonella* and dangerous strains of non-O157:H7 *E. coli* highlight the importance of assuring that FSIS has the necessary tools to address emerging problems. Furthermore, several court decisions have issued rulings, based on outdated understandings of the risk and nature of foodborne pathogens, which have imposed barriers to effective and reasonable oversight of meat and poultry products.

Your bill would provide FSIS with the ability to better oversee the safety of meat and poultry products by providing the agency with the explicit authority to set and enforce performance standards limiting contaminants in meat and poultry products; directing FSIS to address more quickly emerging pathogens such as antibiotic-resistant strains *Salmonella*; requiring companies to test for pathogens; requiring FSIS to trace back contaminated food to the original source of contamination; granting FSIS the authority to conduct research necessary to help administer the law; and providing FSIS new authority to require companies to recall adulterated food;

Modernizing our meat and poultry inspection system is essential to help prevent foodborne illness and to improve consumer confidence in the safety of our food supply. We appreciate your leadership on this issue and look forward to working with you on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Chris Waldrop
Director, Food Policy Institute