

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 1, 2012

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

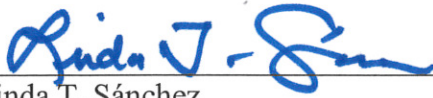
As members of the Labor and Working Families Caucus, we are writing to express our support for the promulgation of a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) amendment to the Agriculture Acquisition Regulation (AGAR), which would require that all contractors doing business with the USDA certify that they and their subcontractors comply with labor laws. We are aware that such a rule was published in the Federal Register at 76 Fed. Reg. 74, 755 (December 1, 2011) and later withdrawn. It is our understanding that USDA withdrew the rule for further review and is considering reissuing a similar rule. We encourage you to undertake this process as expeditiously as possible while adhering to the proper rulemaking procedures.

As you may know, the purpose of the Labor and Working Families Caucus is to protect the rights of working families and advocate on their behalf at the federal level. It is with this sense of purpose that we write today. Requiring government contractors to certify compliance with applicable labor laws is not an undue burden on employers, who already are obligated to comply with labor laws. The proposed policy nonetheless would be an important measure to improve compliance with labor laws and ensure that government contracts do not result in violation of important labor protections.

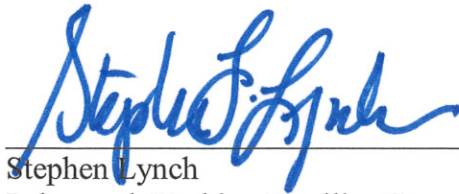
As you know, the USDA buys a large quantity of food for its school lunch program, and workers in the farming and food processing industries suffer a high number of labor law violations. Farmworkers are particularly subject to abuses, including violations of such basic protections as the minimum wage and health and safety standards. If USDA ensures that it only does business with employers that obey labor laws, it will create an incentive for employers to make greater efforts at compliance with the law. Similarly, by requiring contractors to ensure labor law compliance by the farms and processing plants that supply the produce, USDA will reduce labor law violations. The results of the proposed policy will not only protect workers but will reward law-abiding employers who suffer unfair competition from employers that keep their business costs low by paying illegal, substandard wages and subject workers to unsafe conditions.

We applaud your efforts in this direction and urge the continuation of this important rule-making process.

Sincerely,



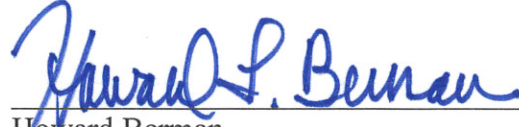
Linda T. Sánchez
Labor and Working Families Caucus Co-Chair
Member of Congress



Stephen Lynch
Labor and Working Families Caucus Co-Chair
Member of Congress



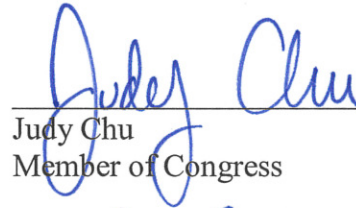
Joe Baca
Member of Congress



Howard P. Berman
Member of Congress



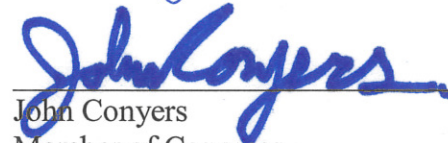
Russ Carnahan
Member of Congress




Judy Chu
Member of Congress



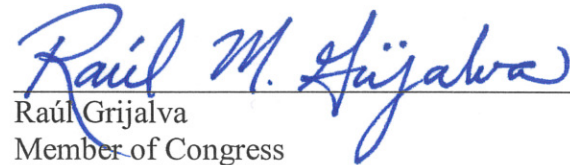
Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



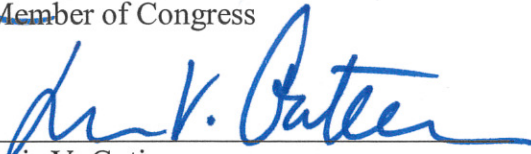
John Conyers
Member of Congress



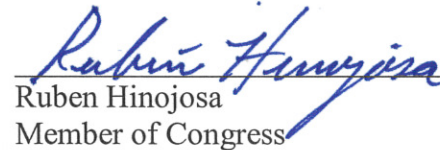
Chaka Fattah
Member of Congress



Raúl Grijalva
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Luis V. Gutierrez
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Ruben Hinojosa
Member of Congress



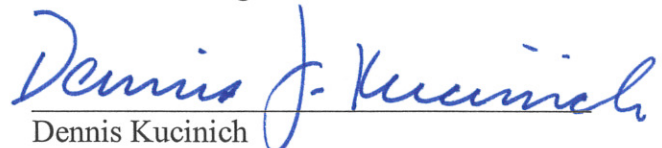
Mazie K. Hirono
Member of Congress



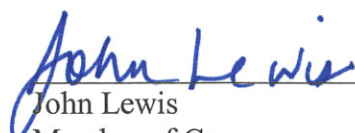
Mike Honda
Member of Congress



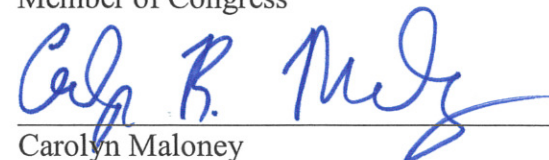
Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



Dennis Kucinich
Member of Congress



John Lewis
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Betty McCollum

Betty McCollum
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GEORGE Miller

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Laura Richardson

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Jan Schakowsky

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Louise Slaughter

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Pete Stark

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Lynn Woolsey

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