

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Speaker John Boehner
1011 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Majority Leader Eric Cantor
303 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Dan Lungren
House Administration Committee
2313 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

March 14, 2011

Dear Speaker Boehner, Majority Leader Cantor, and Chairman Lungren:

We are writing to express our deep concern with the current choice to use polystyrene products, commonly known as "styrofoam,"¹ in the House of Representatives cafeterias. While we appreciate that the CAO is working to reduce costs, there are significant health and environmental risks associated with styrofoam, as well as additional costs associated with increased waste removal. These external costs should be considered in making the decision for cafeteria products; the desire to save a few pennies should never come at the expense of jeopardizing staff, members and visitors' health. Over 20 years ago, McDonalds and other fast food restaurants replaced polystyrene foam with recyclable and paperboard containers. More than 100 cities have also chosen to ban polystyrene foam for health and environmental reasons. Adopting the same standard is the least we can do.

We have numerous concerns about the safety of polystyrene foam products. Polystyrene foam products can leach their component chemicals into the foods and liquids they contain. Leaching of styrene and benzene is documented with nearly 40 years of scientific evidence, as are the resulting negative health impacts.² During the manufacturing process, acute short-term exposure to styrene can result in irritation to the eyes, nose, throat, and mucous membranes as well as gastrointestinal effects.

Over time, exposure to the styrene that leaches into food and liquids can cause extensive health effects, including fatigue, headaches, hearing loss, central nervous system dysfunction, difficulty sleeping, as well as low platelet and hemoglobin values and chromosomal abnormalities.³⁴ The International Agency for Research on Cancer classified styrene as a potential human carcinogen.

¹ "Styrofoam" is the Dow Chemical-owned brand of polystyrene foam.

² K. Figge, "Migration of Additives from Plastic Films into Edible Oils and Fat Stimulants," *Food Cosmet. Toxicol.*, December 10, 1972, Vol. 6, pages 815-828.

³ "Polystyrene & Health Homepage" <http://www.ejnet.org/plastics/polystyrene/health.html#1d> Accessed 3/2/2011

⁴ US Environmental Protection Agency, Technology Transfer Network. "Styrene" <http://www.epa.gov/ttnatw01/hlthef/styrene.html> Accessed 3/2/2011


Eliminating polystyrene-related health impacts will result in fewer lost work days and lower health insurance costs for the House and its staff. This benefit alone should outweigh any cost savings from using polystyrene containers.


Polystyrene foam products continue to threaten public health and the environment after they are used and discarded. Polystyrene is not easily or cheaply recycled, and there are significant health and environmental impacts from the 25 million polystyrene foam cups that are thrown away per year. When disposed of in landfills, products made of polystyrene take over half a millennium to biodegrade. While in landfills, polystyrene chemicals can leach into groundwater, jeopardizing water quality. The safe incineration of polystyrene foam requires extremely high heat in specialized plants. Incineration at normal heat levels releases over 90 different hazardous chemicals, polluting the air quality of those communities surrounding the waste plants and burdening them with increased health risks and costs.


Although we strongly support efforts to reduce costs in the federal government, it is our understanding that the cafeteria operations generate profits for the House – an estimated \$879,000 for 2010. Any costs associated with composting or any of the other environmentally sound options were always meant to be offset by these profits. Those of us who are concerned about the health and safety of Members, staff and visitors feel that this is certainly a worthwhile use for these proceeds.

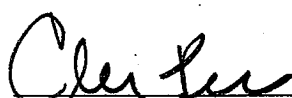
The irresponsibility of the decision to use polystyrene foam without considering other options is all the more egregious because the cafeteria is not merely used by House members and our staffers. The health of constituents and visitors to the Hill who eat in the cafeteria will be impacted by this short-sighted decision. We urge you to bear in mind our responsibility to protect the health and welfare of the American public, now and in future generations, and to reconsider the decision to use Polystyrene foam in our cafeteria.

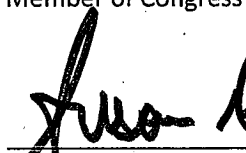
Sincerely,

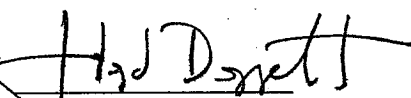

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

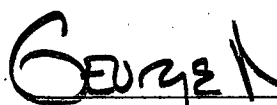

James Moran
Member of Congress



Mike Honda
Member of Congress



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress


Susan Davis
Member of Congress

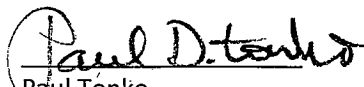

Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

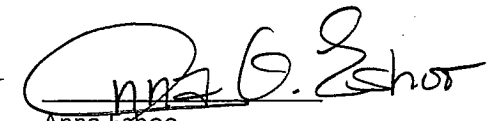

George Miller
Member of Congress

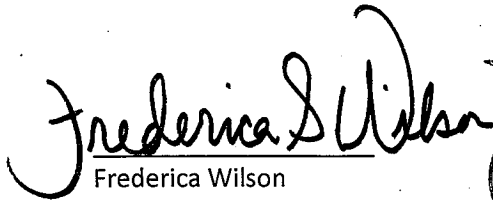

Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress

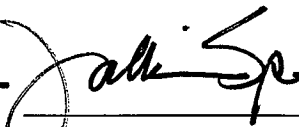

Robert Brady
Member of Congress

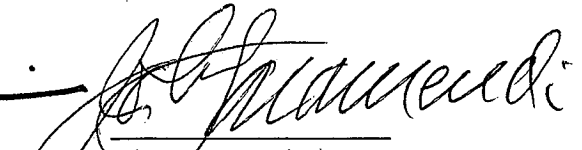

Jim Langevin
Member of Congress


Paul Tonko
Member of Congress



Anna Eshoo
Member of Congress

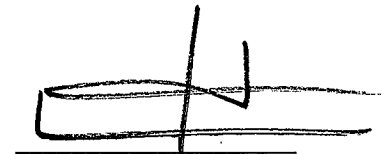

Frederica Wilson
Member of Congress


Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

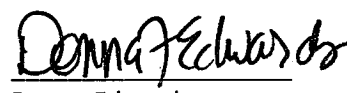

John Garamendi
Member of Congress

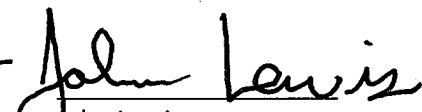

Mike Thompson
Member of Congress

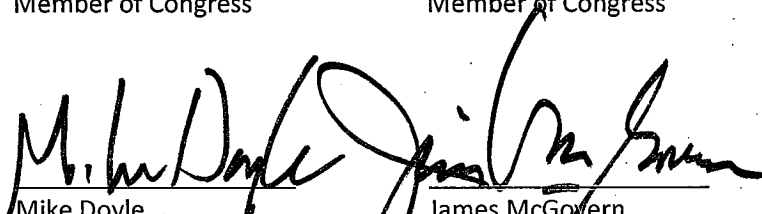

Frank Pallone
Member of Congress

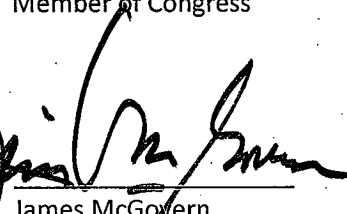

Colleen Hanabusa
Member of Congress

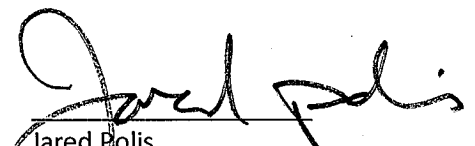

Pete Stark
Member of Congress

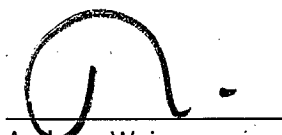

Donna Edwards
Member of Congress

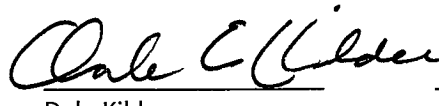

John Lewis
Member of Congress

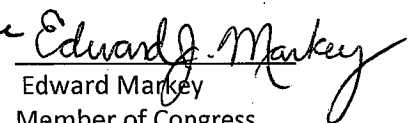

Mike Doyle
Member of Congress

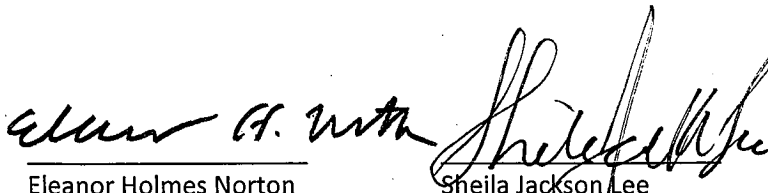

James McGovern
Member of Congress

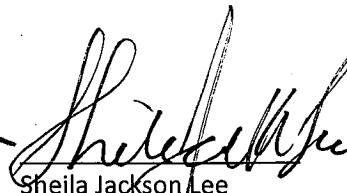

Jared Polis
Member of Congress

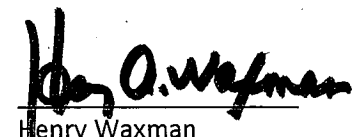

Anthony Weiner
Member of Congress



Dale Kildee
Member of Congress

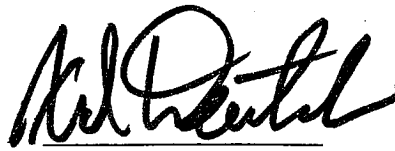

Edward Markey
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

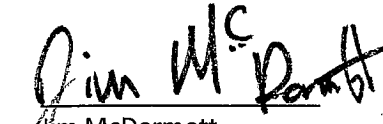

Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress



Henry Waxman
Member of Congress

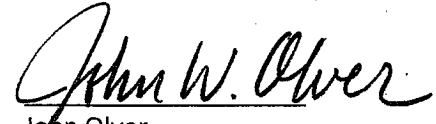

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

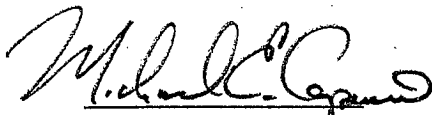

Ted Deutch
Member of Congress

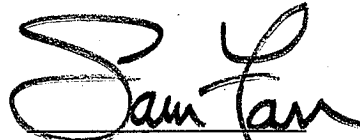

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

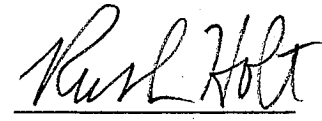

Jim McDermott
Member of Congress

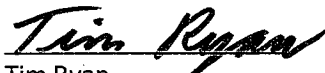

Lois Capps
Member of Congress

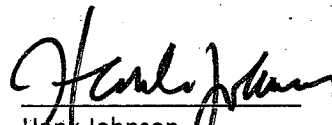

John Oliver
Member of Congress



Michael Capuano
Member of Congress



Sam Farr
Member of Congress



Rush Holt
Member of Congress

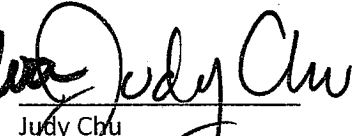

Tim Ryan
Member of Congress

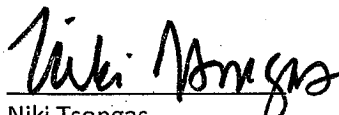

Hank Johnson
Member of Congress

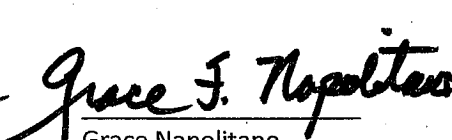

Emanuel Cleaver
Member of Congress



Charles Gonzalez
Member of Congress



Raul Grijalva
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress

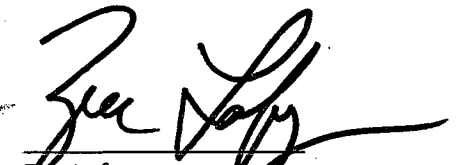

Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress


Grace Napolitano
Member of Congress


Chris Van Hollen
Member of Congress


Betty McCollum
Member of Congress


Mike Quigley
Member of Congress

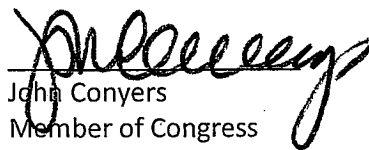

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



Jesse Jackson
Member of Congress



Linda Sánchez
Member of Congress

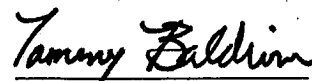


John Conyers
Member of Congress



Bob Filner
Member of Congress

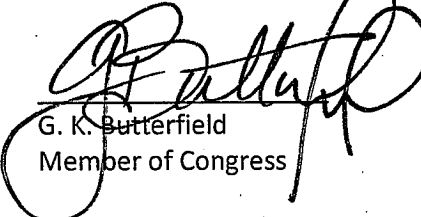
Maurice D. Hinchey
Member of Congress



Tammy Baldwin
Member of Congress



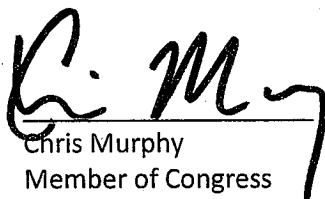
Maxine Waters
Member of Congress



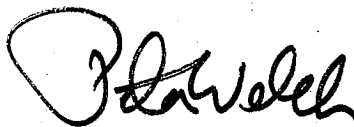
G. K. Butterfield
Member of Congress



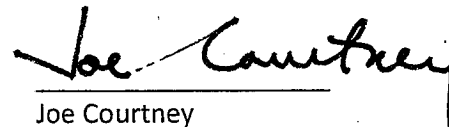
David Loebsack
Member of Congress



Chris Murphy
Member of Congress



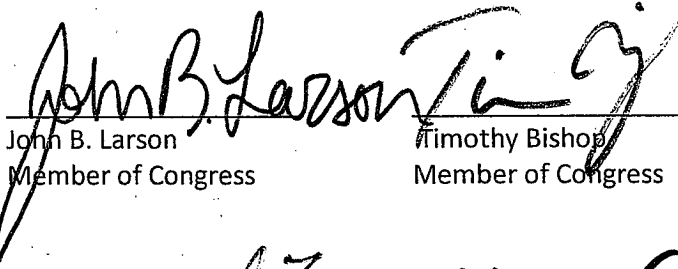
Peter Welch
Member of Congress



Joe Courtney
Member of Congress

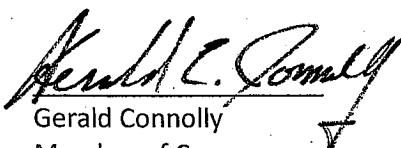


Karen Bass
Member of Congress

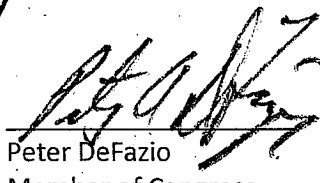


John B. Larson
Member of Congress

Timothy Bishop
Member of Congress



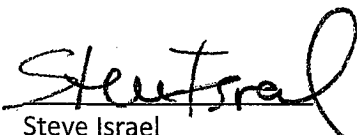
Gerald Connolly
Member of Congress



Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress



Keith Ellison
Member of Congress



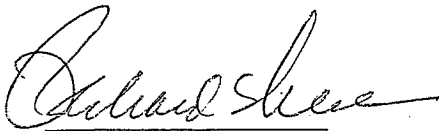
Steve Israel
Member of Congress



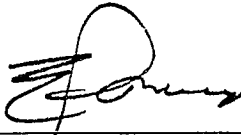
Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



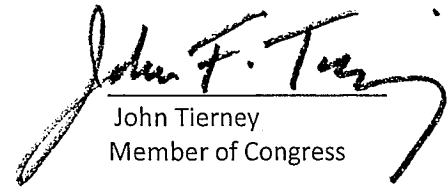
Ed Perlmutter
Member of Congress



Richard Neal
Member of Congress



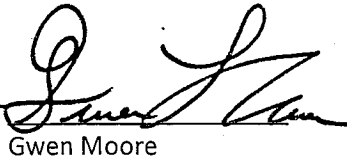
Edolphus Towns
Member of Congress



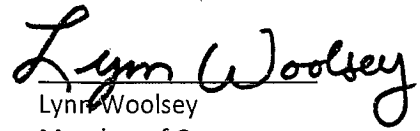
John Tierney
Member of Congress



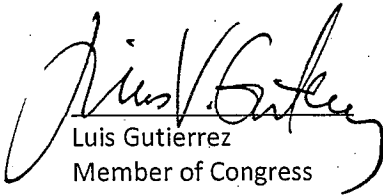
Brad Sherman
Member of Congress



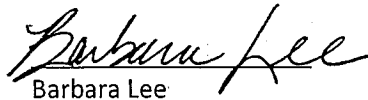
Gwen Moore
Member of Congress



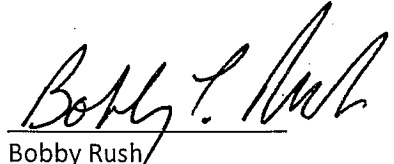
Lynn Woolsey
Member of Congress



Luis Gutierrez
Member of Congress



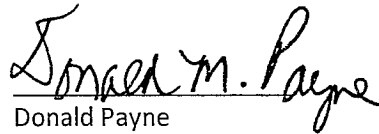
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



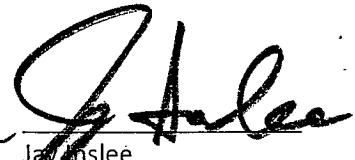
Bobby Rush
Member of Congress



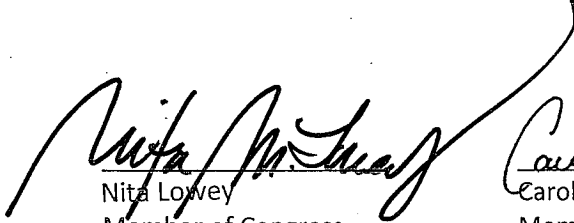
Steven Rothman
Member of Congress



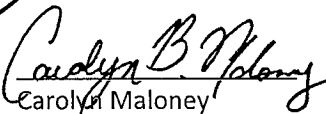
Donald Payne
Member of Congress



Jay Inslee
Member of Congress



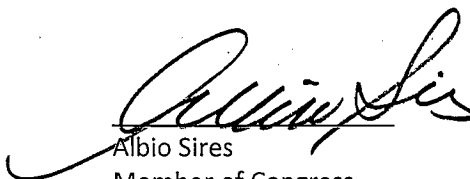
Nita Lowey
Member of Congress



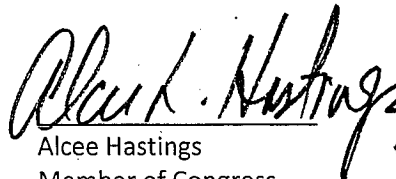
Carolyn Maloney
Member of Congress



David Wu
Member of Congress



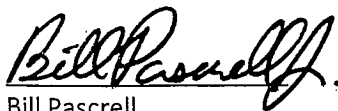
Albio Sires
Member of Congress



Alcee Hastings
Member of Congress



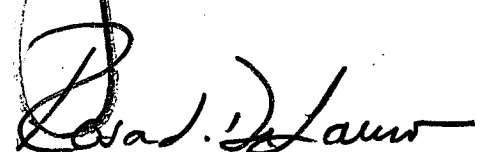
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



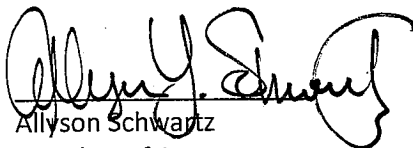
Bill Pascrell
Member of Congress

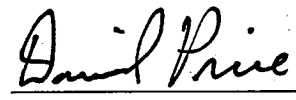


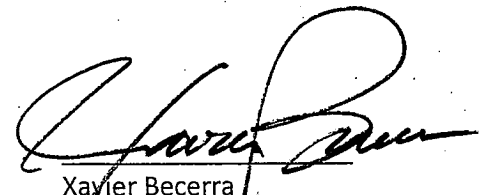
Adam Schiff
Member of Congress




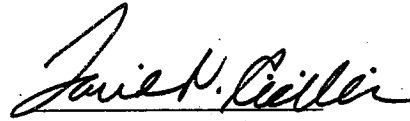
Rosa DeLauro
Member of Congress

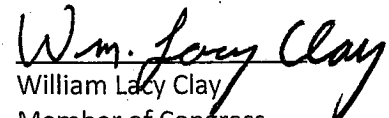

Allyson Schwartz
Member of Congress

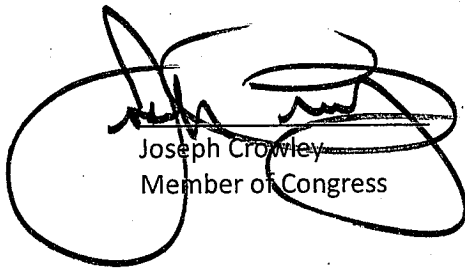

David Price
Member of Congress



Xavier Becerra
Member of Congress

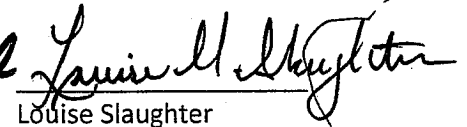

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

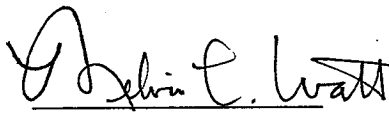

David Cicilline
Member of Congress

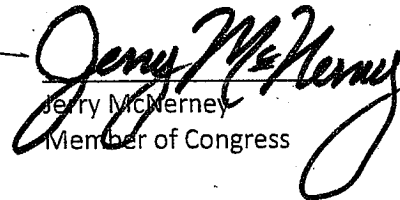

William Lacy Clay
Member of Congress

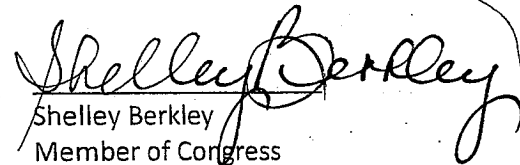

Joseph Crowley
Member of Congress


Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress


Louise Slaughter
Member of Congress


Melvin Watt
Member of Congress


Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress


Shelley Berkley
Member of Congress