

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 15, 2014

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

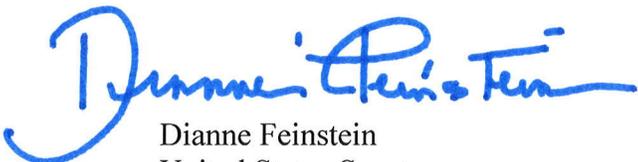
We write to urge you to develop strong performance standards for poultry products that will significantly reduce foodborne illnesses and deaths. It is our view that you must address both *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* in these standards. We are encouraged to hear that your Department will publish a new *Salmonella* standard for poultry parts before the end of September and for ground poultry products by the end of the 2014. However, we are deeply discouraged to learn that your Department has no timeline for when it will establish *Campylobacter* standards for these products.

It is critical that new performance standards are set at a level that will reduce the number of illnesses and deaths attributed to *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) estimates that these two pathogens cause nearly two million illnesses, 27,500 hospitalizations, and over 450 deaths each year. What is even more troubling is that the CDC reports that our food safety system has not reduced the number of illnesses caused by *Salmonella* since 2000. Furthermore, the CDC reports that as of 2012, *Campylobacter* illnesses have increased by 14% compared with the baseline number of annual illnesses that occurred between 2007 and 2008.

We are very concerned about the current levels of *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* on poultry products, and believe new pathogen standards should reduce these rates of contamination. Testing by the National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System between 2002 and 2011 found that 47 percent of chicken breasts in grocery stores tested positive for *Campylobacter*. Routine testing by your Department in 2013 found that over 40 percent of ground chicken tested positive for *Salmonella*. A study completed by your Department in 2012 also found that 26 percent of poultry parts tested positive for *Salmonella* and that 21 percent tested positive for *Campylobacter*.

We deeply appreciate the hard work of your Department on this important public health matter, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Dick Durbin
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator