

Support the Safe Line Speeds in COVID-19 Act (H.R. 7521 / S. 4338)

Stop slaughterhouses from operating at extremely fast speeds during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Safe Line Speeds in COVID-19 Act was introduced in the 116th Congress in the House by Reps. Marcia Fudge (D-OH), Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), and Bennie Thompson (D-MS), and in the Senate by Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ).

What will the Safe Line Speeds in COVID-19 Act do?

The Safe Line Speeds in COVID-19 Act will better protect slaughterhouse workers, animals, and consumers from the dangers posed by higher-speed, privatized slaughter systems. It would prohibit these dangerous systems from operating during the COVID-19 pandemic, when workers are even more vulnerable to the hazards of increased line speeds.

Specifically, this legislation would prevent the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food Safety & Inspection Service (FSIS) from approving requests from slaughterhouses to increase their line speeds and suspend existing approvals during the COVID-19 public health emergency. It would also require the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a review of actions by the USDA in response to the pandemic to determine the effectiveness of such actions in protecting animal, food, and worker safety.

Why is the Safe Line Speeds in COVID-19 Act Necessary?

The line speed waiver systems for birds and the New Swine Slaughter Inspection System for pigs threaten animals, workers, and consumers. These systems decrease and privatize food safety inspections and allow for increases in slaughter line speeds, which already run dangerously fast. Increasing line speeds jeopardizes animal welfare by increasing the likelihood of inhumane handling, botched stunning, and violations of the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act.

Due to the failure of meat corporations to proactively protect workers with personal protective equipment, social distancing, and other preventive measures during the novel coronavirus outbreak, slaughterhouses rapidly became

hotspots for the spread of COVID-19 in the U.S. As of September 2020, more than 42,000 slaughterhouse and meatpacking workers have tested positive for the virus, and at least 200 workers and 4 inspectors have died from COVID-19.



In April 2020, amidst these coronavirus outbreaks in plants, the USDA approved a record number of waivers for poultry plants to operate their line speeds in excess of regulatory caps, allowing them to slaughter up to 175 birds per minute, instead of 140 birds per minute. This action directly disregards the need to protect workers from the virus, as faster line speeds limit the ability to socially distance. An analysis by the National Employment Law Project found that each of the 15 plants that received a waiver during April had a record of severe injuries, has been cited for worker safety violations, and/or has become a COVID-19 hotspot.

Who Supports the Bill?

The Safe Line Speeds in COVID-19 Act is supported by a diverse coalition of animal welfare, worker safety, and consumer safety groups, as well as unions that represent the plant workers and the federal inspectors. This coalition is gravely concerned about the impacts of faster line speeds in slaughterhouses on animals, plant employees, and food safety.