



November 17, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
U.S. Senate  
Chairman  
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael B. Enzi  
U.S. Senate  
Ranking Member  
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee  
835 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Senator Enzi:

I am writing on behalf of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) to urge approval by the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee of S. 510, the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act.

NACCHO supports the development of a science-based food safety system that assures local public health department participation in all areas of food safety as a means to reduce foodborne illness. Conducting regulation of food service, retail, and manufacturing establishments and surveillance and investigation of foodborne illnesses are functions performed on a daily basis by local health departments across the country. Local health department infrastructure has been challenged as local government budgets are stretched, and support of workforce and capacity at the local level is critical. In the first six months of this year, local health departments experienced the loss of 8,000 jobs and 12,000 personnel were subject to reduced hours or mandatory furloughs. This bill helps to strengthen local, state and federal partnerships by creating a working group on foodborne illness surveillance and requiring the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop and implement strategies to leverage and enhance the food safety and defense capacities of public health agencies.

We also appreciate the inclusion of the requirement for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to implement public notification of recalls, as has already been achieved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). This helps to increase uniformity across federal food safety agencies and protect the public's health by providing information that previously was often unavailable in a timely fashion.

The FDA Food Safety Modernization Act would help modernize FDA's regulatory structure by strengthening surveillance and traceability, requiring hazard control standards in all facilities, giving the FDA more enforcement mechanisms, and increasing inspections of food facilities. There is wide agreement among the public health and scientific community that FDA cannot adequately protect America's food supply with existing authorities.

We look forward to working with you as the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act moves forward. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to improving the public's health.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Pestronk  
Executive Director

