



February 3, 2009

Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman DeLauro:

On behalf of Trust for America's Health (TFAH), a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority, I would like to express our support for the "Food Safety Modernization Act." If passed, this act would establish a Food Safety Administration within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that would have responsibility for all food safety issues currently administered by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

TFAH views food safety as a fundamental component of public health, as the security of our food supply affects every household. However, the nation's food safety system is in crisis. The current outbreak of *salmonella* in peanut butter products is only the latest illustration of a weakened food protection system plagued with serious gaps in leadership, legislative authorities, and surveillance coordination and capacity. TFAH's 2008 report, "Fixing Food Safety: Protecting America's Food Supply from Farm-to-Fork," identified major gaps in the nation's food safety system, including obsolete laws, misallocation of resources, and inconsistencies among major food safety agencies. The result is a fractionalized system focusing on antiquated threats, instead of a strategic approach to protecting the nation's food supply through state-of-the-art technologies, practices, and policies.

Sustained leadership from HHS is required to revitalize the food safety system, and drive the changes in government and industry food safety practices that are needed to restore public confidence. However, currently HHS is structurally ill-equipped to provide that leadership. FDA is fragmented internally and plagued by chronically weak leadership on food safety: no FDA official whose full time job is food safety has line authority over all elements of FDA's food safety program. No agency has statutory authority or a practical mandate to forge an integrated strategy that puts research, regulatory, and educational tools of government to work in a coherent way to minimize risks.

Your legislation would take significant steps to address the inherent vulnerabilities in HHS' federal regulatory system by consolidating FDA's food safety functions under a single agency, headed by a single Commissioner. The bill represents a pragmatic

approach to addressing the structural weaknesses of our current system. Instead of continuing to apply piecemeal fixes to a broken system, your bill would streamline federal leadership on food safety and enable a long-term strategic vision to be implemented. The legislation also addresses the outdated approach of our existing system by emphasizing hazard analysis, risk communication, federal-state coordination, and preventive controls.

We applaud your continued leadership on the issue of food safety. We look forward to working with your office on this legislation as the 111th Congress progresses. Please feel free to contact Richard Hamburg, Director of Government Relations at (202) 223-9876 or rhamburg@tfah.org or Dara Alpert Lieberman at (202) 223-9870 x-20 or dlieberman@tfah.org should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey Levi". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jeffrey Levi, PhD
Executive Director