July 23, 2020

Dear Senators:

Meatpacking workers in Nebraska are among the hardest hit by the pandemic, and meatpacking plants have been one of the state's most serious vectors for COVID-19. More than 4,777 packing plant employees have fallen ill from COVID-19, at least 218 have been hospitalized, and at least 19 have died (of the cases known to Nebraska’s Department of Health and Human Services). Moreover, as of the beginning of the month, nearly 60% of confirmed COVID-19 cases identify as Hispanic, despite making up 11% of the state's population.

We have seen more than three months of slow and insufficient action by meat and poultry plants to proactively institute COVID-19 safety protections. As cases continue to rise, we can't afford to navigate the next six months without clear protections.

Unfortunately, conditions in meatpacking plants across Nebraska continue to foster COVID-19 virus spread. Nebraska workers - our family and community members - continue to face high risks, without consistent 6-feet physical distancing and other protections, without effective screening and quarantine practices, without paid leave, and without hope for plants making these safety improvements. These problems have been unfolding for months, causing illness, fear, and death for families and communities across the state. Governor Ricketts has done nothing to create clear and enforceable protections for meatpacking workers.

We call on the Legislature to take immediate action in the remaining days of the legislative session to establish clear and enforceable COVID-19 temporary protections for meat and poultry plants to keep workers, families, and communities safe - as well as to safeguard food production and Nebraska farmers.

The Legislature is in session and must act now. This cannot wait until the next legislative session. Nebraskans feeding our state and our country deserve at least the same consideration as businesses incentives and property owners. The body can and must take action now and pass meaningful worker protections during the remaining days of the session. Failure to do so will mean more fear and death, and worsening conditions for our communities as a whole.

As community organizations, farm organizations, and worker representatives with deep connections to workers across the state, we stand ready to support that effort. We urge you to pass legislation to protect meatpacking workers now.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Nebraska
Center for Rural Affairs
Centro Hispano (Columbus)
Children of Smithfield (Crete)
First United Methodist Church
Gateway District United Methodist Church (Gibbon, Kearney, Lexington, etc.)
The Great Plains Conference, United Methodist Church
Heartland Family Service
Heartland Workers Center
Immigrant Legal Center

(continued on p. 2)
Latino American Commission
Mothers and Others: Justice and Mercy for Immigrants
Multicultural Coalition (Grand Island)
Nebraska Appleseed
Nebraska Farmers Union
Nebraska Hispanic Bar Association
Nebraskans for Peace
OTOC Immigration and Refugee Action Team
Peace with Justice Ministries, Great Plains United Methodists
Refugee Empowerment Center
Schlegel Center for Service and Justice, Creighton University
Solidarity with Packing Plant Workers
The Trinidad Center (Lexington)
UFCW Local 293
Unity in Action (South Sioux City)

For questions, contact:
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