



Miltona Custom Meats

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House Representatives,

My name is Kristy Brackett. My husband and I co-own Miltona Custom Meats in Miltona, MN. We are writing today regarding MN HF 23, The Safe Workplaces for Meat and Poultry Processing Workers Act. While we are a small meat processor with 11 employees. We are concerned about the initial introduction of this bill with its lack of exclusion in regards number of employees, and about impacts to our potential future growth should we ever reach 50 employees.

Overall, this bill appears to be some House members' attempt to backdoor new law specifically targeting the meat packing industry and **evade and circumvent change** to several laws and guidelines which already exist to regulate most or all employers within the United States and Minnesota through the Departments of Labor, OSHA and MNOSHA, workers compensation, federal and state whistleblower protections, Family Medical Leave Acts, and precedents set during past public health emergencies.

This bill, which, again, specifically targets the meat processing industry while not addressing the same safety concerns inherent to other industries, will have detrimental impacts on small processors' ability to compete. It will negatively impact business owners' ability to make reasonable decisions for the benefit of the business and this bill penalizes meat processors simply for existing as meat processors.

There are at least two local grocery stores and one Walmart (which is well known for its decidedly unfriendly employee practices) with meat departments in which some form of meat processing takes place within 20 minutes of our location. According to this bill, these stores are not required to provide sick time; spend money, time, and resources on a work safety committee and training; or provide unidirectional ventilation for their staff during the next air born pandemic. The meat processor will have to absorb and upcharge for these costs with the passage of this bill. If we expand the driving radius to an hour away, we will include stores such as Costco and Sam's Club which also have meat departments. We live and work in rural Minnesota, so it is not uncommon to drive an hour for food. Walmart, Costco, and Sam's Club do not need the House's help in reducing competition with local food suppliers.

Further, this bill fails to address the same or similar working conditions at suppliers of other foods, such as produce and canned and packaged goods, all of which are handled in some way in factories and distribution centers with their own high numbers of people, ergonomic safety concerns, and stale air.

OSHA currently provides guidelines to address ergonomics in the workplace. As far as we know, there is currently no statute in the United States which requires employers to specifically address workplace ergonomics. We believe this lack of law to be justified. Guidelines provide employers with a reasonable amount of discretion to both satisfy employee safety needs and maintain the financial health of their business. HF 23 as written allows for no employer oversight of or input within a safety committee or reasonable veto power of committee recommendations. Simply put, and at its worst, our business cannot afford to buy hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of equipment based upon the

recommendations of a committee made of employees that have no knowledge of the financial health or financial obligations of the business. Further, we cannot afford to pay penalties for failing to meet the recommendations of that same financially ignorant committee or an equally ignorant Worker Rights Coordinator.

Minnesota 182.676 already requires employers to create a workplace safety committee in cases where more than 25 employees are employed. In businesses with fewer than 25 employees, employers are justifiably penalized for having an abnormally high number of lost workday cases or are mandated to have a safety committee as a result of the dangers inherent in the job. According to my insurance agent, considering all the dangerous occupations that exist, meat processors are probably not in the top 25% of workers compensation premium rates.

Finally, not as business owners within the meat processing industry, but as citizens of Minnesota, we are concerned about the creation of a new position within the Department of Labor and Industry which will **duplicate** the work of MNOSHA to the tune of \$529,000 over two years. Any money to be appropriated according to this bill should be funneled instead to programs which will accomplish the same goal of employee safety, and we would suggest, employer education around employee safety – both of which are currently available through MNOSHA.

Respectfully,

Kristy Brackett

Justin Schroeder

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