



**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **Food Deaths Are Stark Reminder That Delaying Regulatory Safeguards Puts People at Risk**

### **Proposed Laws Seek to Add Delays, Give Corporations Greater Influence**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The recent U.S. outbreak of foodborne illness – the deadliest in more than a decade – is a stark reminder that regulations play a vital role in protecting the public, the Coalition for Sensible Safeguards said today. The current attack on regulations in Congress poses a serious threat to public safety and should be rejected.

“The deaths are an urgent reminder that consumers are waiting for the Food and Drug Administration to release guidelines and regulations to help keep pathogens out of produce,” said Caroline Smith DeWaal, food safety director at the Center for Science in the Public Interest. “The FDA should move rapidly to release its guidelines and regulations for the production of safe produce, currently due for release in January 2012 and January 2013, respectively. Congress should fully fund FDA to implement the Food Safety Modernization Act, to ensure that outbreaks like this stop breaking records.”

As many as 13 people in eight states have died after eating cantaloupe contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes* that are linked to tainted Colorado-grown cantaloupes. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that since the outbreak began in late July at least 72 people had fallen ill in 18 states.

There are more than two dozen bills currently proposed in Congress that threaten the nation’s regulatory system. This attack on public protections would result in an even more deadly future, should the backers of Big Business succeed in getting their sweetheart bills passed into law. One particularly troubling attempt is the Regulatory Accountability Act, which would increase the chances of a foodborne illness spreading through the population.

It is a radical measure that would trump all other existing laws and require that costs to businesses, not the benefits of protecting the public, be the primary consideration in determining what new government rules should be issued. All regulatory agencies, including the FDA would be covered.

This bill would change procedural and evidentiary requirements, add more delays, and set an even higher bar than currently exists for issuing needed protections. Ultimately, the bill would tie up the limited resources of federal regulatory agencies in court battles, undermining their ability to improve public health, safety, and environmental regulations and sapping the resources that should be put into enforcement. The bill also changes the rulemaking process to give corporations greater influence.

"Corporate interference in food safety already is a problem," said Francesca Grifo, senior scientist and director of the Scientific Integrity Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists. "When we surveyed more than 1,700 federal food safety inspectors and scientists last year, 558 respondents, more than a third, told us that agencies gave too much weight to businesses in the decision-making process. More than 300 respondents said they had personally experienced a situation where a corporate interest was able to get an agency policy designed to protect consumers or the public health withdrawn or significantly modified."

Heather McGhee, director of Demos' Washington office added, "How many more disasters – in our food system, our financial sector or our energy industries – will it take to convince the deregulators in Congress that good rules are good for America? It's time for our public officials to put the public first, and reject the lobbyist wish list of anti-regulation legislation currently pending on the Hill."

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*The Coalition for Sensible Safeguards is an alliance of consumer, labor, scientific, research, good government, faith, community, health, environmental, and public interest groups, as well as concerned individuals, joined in the belief that our country's system of regulatory safeguards provides a stable framework that secures our quality of life and paves the way for a sound economy that benefits us all. For more information about the coalition, see [http://www.sensiblesafeguards.org/about\\_us](http://www.sensiblesafeguards.org/about_us).*