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March 12, 2025

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C., 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins,

I write to express serious concerns with your recent decision to terminate the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Foods (NACMCF) and National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection (NACMPI). The NACMCF provides impartial, scientific advice and recommendations to USDA on microbiological and public health issues relative to the safety of the U.S. food supply while NACMPI advises on matters affecting federal and state inspection program activities.¹ This Administration's misguided attempt at "reducing bureaucracy" threatens to halt any progress made toward strengthening the safety of our food supply.² I urge you to reestablish these advisory committees, as dismissing scientific expertise on the heels of several food contaminations – some deadly – is dangerous and irresponsible.

Foodborne illness in the United States continues to be a significant public health threat. Three years ago, infant formula linked to Abbott Nutrition killed two infants.³ Last year, deli meat linked to Boar's Head killed 10 people.⁴ This year the ongoing frozen supplement shakes linked to Prairie Farms has already killed 12 people.⁵ Disbanding these committees will

¹ "National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Foods (NACMCF)," U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service, February 12, 2025, <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/policy/advisory-committees/national-advisory-committee-microbiological-criteria-foods-nacmcf>; "National Advisory Committee on Meat and Poultry Inspection (NACMPI)," U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service, November 15, 2024, <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/policy/advisory-committees/national-advisory-committee-meat-and-poultry-inspection-nacmpi>.

² Tom Polansek and Leah Douglas, "USDA Eliminates Two Food Safety Advisory Committees," Reuters, March 7, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/usda-eliminates-two-food-safety-advisory-committees-members-say-2025-03-07/>.

³ "FDA Investigation of Cronobacter Infections: Powdered Infant Formula (February 2022)," U.S. Food and Drug Administration, August 1, 2022, <https://www.fda.gov/food/outbreaks-foodborne-illness/fda-investigation-cronobacter-infections-powdered-infant-formula-february-2022>.

⁴ "Listeria Outbreak Linked to Meats Sliced at Delis," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, January 31, 2025, <https://www.cdc.gov/listeria/outbreaks/delimeats-7-24.html>.

⁵ "Outbreak Investigation of Listeria Monocytogenes: Frozen Supplemental Shakes (February 2025)," U.S. Food and Drug Administration, February 24, 2025, <https://www.fda.gov/food/outbreaks-foodborne-illness/outbreak-investigation-listeria-monocytogenes-frozen-supplemental-shakes-february-2025>.

hamstringing our public health and food safety agencies from responding to future crises or, better yet, preventing them from happening in the first place.

In December, NACMCF was charged with reviewing USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Services' (FSIS) regulatory approach to *Listeria monocytogenes* to inform any long-term policy changes necessary to protect the public from the fatal bacteria and to improve oversight of facilities.⁶ Further, NACMCF was also reviewing *Cronobacter*, the bacteria linked to the infant formula crisis that led to a nationwide shortage.⁷ Simultaneously, NACMPI was considering a number of issues, including strengthening the food supply chain and ensuring companies comply with food safety regulation.⁸ This work is critical and should be allowed to continue.

I am concerned that your agency will be unable to adequately protect the public from foodborne illnesses and maintain the integrity of our food safety infrastructure, that is why I request answers to the following questions by March 26, 2025.

1. The stated reason for terminating NACMCF and NACMPI was the Executive Order, Commencing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy. Given that committee members were volunteers and the budget for NACMCF is \$225,000 and NACMPI is \$75,000, how was it determined that this work was subject to reduction?
2. These advisory committees are comprised of representatives from across the stakeholder spectrum -- industry, consumers, public health, academia -- who provided impartial, scientific advice and recommendations to USDA, the FDA, and the CDC. How do you envision USDA being able to access this kind of information and expertise going forward?
3. As noted, the upcoming charges for NACMCF included updating and improving the regulatory approach to *Listeria* subsequent to the Boar's Head outbreak last year, as well as reviewing *Cronobacter*, the bacteria linked to the infant formula crisis. Since USDA disbanded NACMCF, what experts will USDA consult in their absence?

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate

⁶ Food Safety Magazine Editorial Team, "USDA Seeking New NACMCF Members to Review FSIS' *Listeria* Regulatory Approach," Food Safety Magazine, December 20, 2024, <https://www.food-safety.com/articles/10024-usda-seeking-new-nacmcf-members-to-review-fsis-listeria-regulatory-approach>.

⁷ Bailee Henderson, "Key Federal Food Safety Advisory Committees, NACMCF and NACMPI, Have Been Terminated," Food Safety Magazine, March 7, 2025, <https://www.food-safety.com/articles/10196-key-federal-food-safety-advisory-committees-nacmcf-and-nacmpi-have-been-terminated>.

⁸ Ibid.