

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 26, 2018

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW, Room 200-A
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write to express deep concern over a recent USDA-APHIS proposal to recognize private, third party inspections and certifications when determining the frequency of federal inspections for facilities regulated under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). Coupled with the agency's decision last year to purge inspection reports from its website, relying on third party inspections would result in a lack of transparency and consistency, both regarding the welfare of animals at licensed facilities and the rigorousness of the enforcement of the AWA.

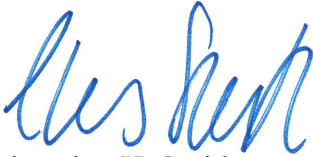
Third party "inspections" or "certifications" have no bearing on whether a facility is in compliance with the AWA. In fact, licensees from all categories – commercial pet breeders, exhibitors, and research facilities – have maintained their accreditation in third party programs, despite having incurred AWA violations. These groups typically provide no reports on the results of their site visits, which may be infrequent and scheduled (rather than unannounced), nor on any penalties meted out for substandard conditions. Conflicts of interest can cause private inspectors to ignore violations. The public would have no way of knowing if a puppy mill or other operation passed its third party inspection, remaining accredited by a self-interested entity that collects dues from its members, and then bypassed USDA inspections because of its supposedly clean record. Accreditation with such entities should be irrelevant in the USDA's assessment of whether and when to inspect a facility regulated under the AWA.

The USDA's experience with industry self-policing under the Horse Protection Act (HPA) demonstrates the inherent problems with this approach. Decades after passage of that Act, the soring of Tennessee walking horses remains rampant in a segment of the industry, in large part because the agency has outsourced inspection of those horses to individuals employed by the industry who often exhibit Tennessee walking horses themselves. The agency's own Office of Inspector General highlighted the conflicts of interest and ineffectiveness of this program in 2010, following a thorough two-year audit, and recommended that the industry self-policing system be abolished with full federal oversight restored, something that the USDA agreed then to pursue. Legislation in the House that would require this reform and prevent individuals with conflicts of interest from becoming licensed inspectors, the PAST Act (H.R. 1847), has the bipartisan support of 277 cosponsors.

Given the continued abuses under the HPA, we do not believe this approach of third party inspections should be extended to facilities regulated under the AWA. We urge the USDA to permanently shelve this proposal – which would effectively outsource federal oversight of

animal welfare and seriously compromise the integrity of AWA enforcement. Instead, the agency should work to provide greater transparency, tighten its enforcement and licensing standards, and streamline its procedures for cracking down on animal cruelty. For almost two decades, a large bipartisan set of legislators has successfully sought funds each year for the USDA to carry out inspections under the AWA, not to hand off this enforcement responsibility to the regulated industries themselves. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



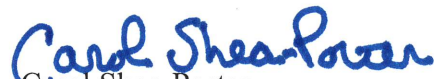
Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress



Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress



Lou Barletta
Member of Congress



Carol Shea-Porter
Member of Congress



Ryan A. Costello
Member of Congress



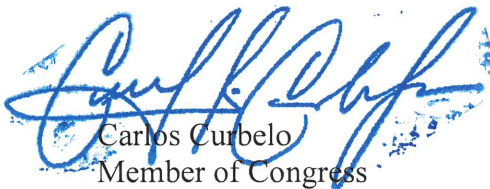
Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Tom Marino
Member of Congress



Ted Lieu
Member of Congress



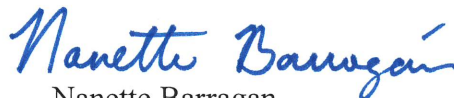
Carlos Curbelo
Member of Congress



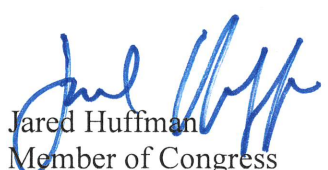
Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress




Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



Nanette Barragan
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress




Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



Mark Takano
Member of Congress




Judy Chu
Member of Congress



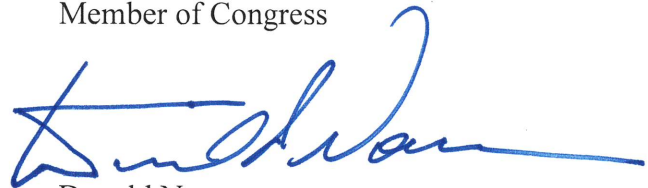
Kathleen M. Rice
Member of Congress



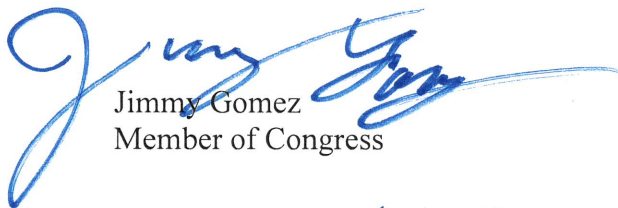
Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



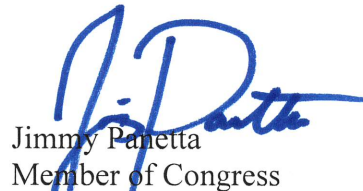
Kurt Schrader
Member of Congress



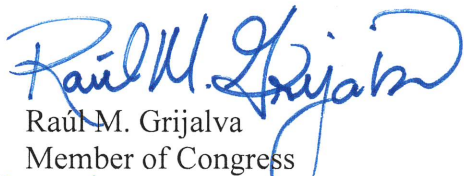
Donald Norcross
Member of Congress




Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress




Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



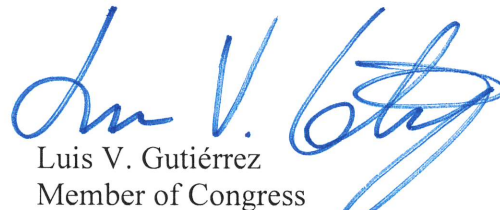
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress




A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress



Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress



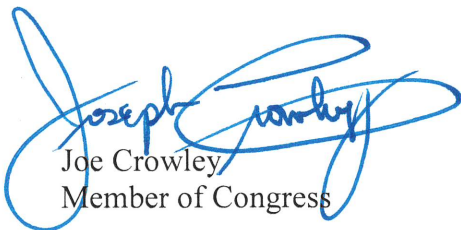
Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



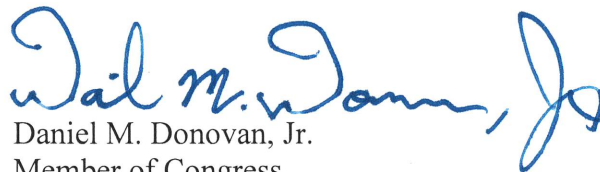
Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress



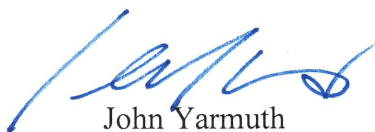
Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress



Joe Crowley
Member of Congress



Daniel M. Donovan, Jr.
Member of Congress



John Yarmuth
Member of Congress



Ed Perlmutter
Member of Congress



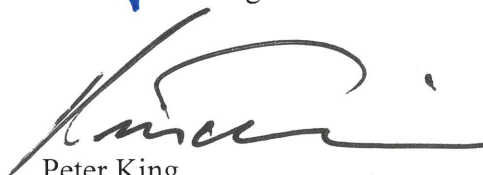
Tony Cardenas
Member of Congress



Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress



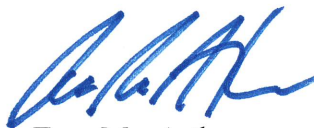
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



Peter King
Member of Congress



Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Tom MacArthur
Member of Congress



Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



Ed Royce
Member of Congress



Albio Sires
Member of Congress



Mike Bishop
Member of Congress

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

Grace Meng
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Daniel W. Lipinski
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Peter Welch
Member of Congress

Gene Green
Member of Congress

Member of Congress
Grace F. Napolitano

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Ted Deutch
Member of Congress

David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress


Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

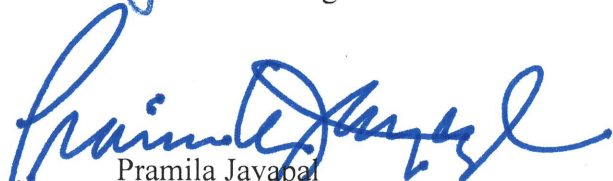
Jared Polis
Member of Congress

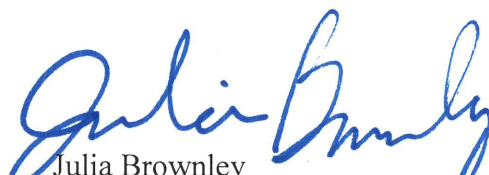
Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Member of Congress

Adam Smith
Member of Congress


Kyrsten Sinema
Member of Congress


Charlie Crist
Member of Congress

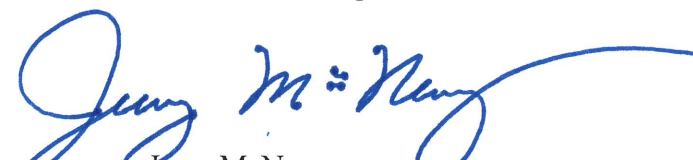

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress


Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



Frank A. LoBiondo
Member of Congress


Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress



Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress


Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

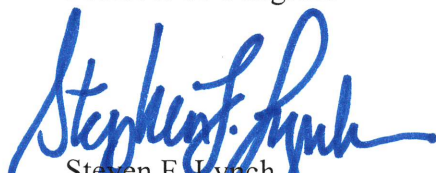

Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

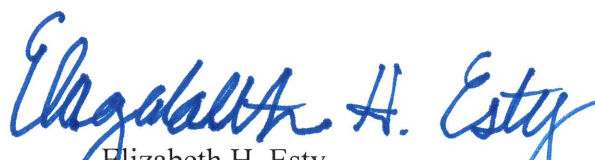

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress


Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress


Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress


Steven F. Lynch
Member of Congress


Elizabeth H. Esty
Member of Congress

Matt Gaetz
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matt Gaetz", positioned to the right of the printed name and title.