

SAFE FOOD COALITION

1620 I Street, NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20006 202-797-8551

May 16, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
H-232, US Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, US Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Amendment 30 of H.R. 2, allowing interstate traffic of raw milk products

Dear Speaker Ryan and Minority Leader Pelosi:

The undersigned members of the Safe Food Coalition write to express our strong opposition to Amendment 30 to H.R. 2, the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018, offered by Rep. Thomas Massie (KY-04). The bill would attempt to expand access to raw milk by prohibiting the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) from fulfilling its food safety enforcement mission—a move that threatens public health. We urge you to oppose any efforts to weaken public health protections relating to this dangerous product.

Each year foodborne diseases sicken 48 million Americans, killing 3,000 of them. Many of these deaths are preventable. Relying on sound science and proven safety interventions—such as pasteurization—is one way to prevent illness. The spread of pasteurization laws across the United States has dramatically decreased the incidence of milk-related foodborne illness outbreaks, which now make up less than 1 percent of all outbreaks (from nearly 25 percent in 1938).¹ Importantly, of that 1 percent, an overwhelming majority—more than 60 percent—of illnesses are linked to raw milk.²

This figure becomes more staggering when you consider that only an estimated 3 million Americans, or no more than 1%, currently drink raw milk, meaning that this small number of consumers bears the enormous burden of dairy-related foodborne illness.³ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also estimated higher hospitalization rates for patients in outbreaks linked to raw milk than those linked to pasteurized milk (13 percent versus 1 percent).⁴ People sickened by raw milk were also more likely to be younger than 20 (60 percent versus 23 percent). This means that raw milk poses heightened risks for children, a vulnerable group who often drink milk as a primary source of nutrition.

¹ LeJeune JT and PJ Rajala-Schultz. Unpasteurized milk: a continued public health threat. *Clinical Infectious Diseases* 2009;48:93-100.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Outbreak studies. June 8, 2017. <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/rawmilk/rawmilk-outbreaks.html>. Accessed May 16, 2018.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

Raw milk advocates claim that raw milk carries significant medicinal benefits. However, none of these claims are supported by rigorous science. In fact, raw milk is known to carry some of the most dangerous foodborne pathogens—*Salmonella*, *E. coli*, *Campylobacter*, and *Listeria*. Prior to pasteurization, milk was a common source of the bacteria that cause tuberculosis, diphtheria, severe streptococcal infections, typhoid fever, and other foodborne illnesses. Recently, the illegal interstate sale of raw milk produced in Texas led to an outbreak of antibiotic-resistant *Brucella* that may have led to illnesses in up to 7 states.⁵ All of these illnesses are preventable through pasteurization, a simple process of heating the fluid to kill bacteria, destroying these dangerous bugs and rendering the milk safe to drink while maintaining the nutritional integrity of the milk.

The ongoing implementation of the bipartisan Food Safety Modernization Act relies on sound science from the FDA and CDC to identify risks and strategies to minimize outbreaks. Both these public health agencies are resoundingly opposed to the consumption of raw milk. The FDA considers raw milk unsafe, and has banned its interstate sale since 1987.⁶ The CDC's website warns consumers: "Raw milk can carry harmful bacteria and other germs that can make you very sick or kill you. While it is possible to get foodborne illnesses from many different foods, raw milk is one of the riskiest of all."⁷

Despite the overwhelming evidence from the public health community and food safety organizations, Amendment 30 threatens to put consumers—especially children—at risk. It seeks to authorize the interstate traffic of raw milk products and to prohibit FDA from taking any enforcement action against the seller.

As food safety advocates who are committed to protecting consumers—just as you are committed to protecting your constituents—we urge you to act to ensure that this bill does not become law. There is simply no justification for undoing decades of public health improvement and risking the lives of consumers on a product that has been proven to be unsafe for human consumption.

Sincerely,

Center for Foodborne Illness, Research & Prevention

Center for Science in the Public Interest

Consumer Federation of America

National Consumers League

STOP Foodborne Illness

The Pew Charitable Trusts

⁵ Beach C, Texas raw milk *Brucella* contamination hits 7 states. *Food Safety News*. September 15, 2017. <http://www.foodsafetynews.com/2017/09/texas-raw-milk-brucella-contamination-strikes-7-states/#.Wvxj3ogvzD4>. Accessed May 16, 2018.

⁶ Food and Drug Administration. Food safety and raw milk. November 23, 2017. www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/GuidanceDocumentsRegulatoryInformation/Milk/ucm277854.htm

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Raw milk questions and answers. June 15, 2017. www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/rawmilk/raw-milk-questions-and-answers.html. Accessed May 16, 2018.