



February 5, 2021

To: House Economic Matters Committee

From: Perdue Farms

Bill: HB 581 – Labor and Employment – Employment Standards During an Emergency (Maryland Essential Workers’ Protection Act)

Position: **OPPOSE**

Position Statement on Maryland House Bill 581: Labor and Employment-Employment Standards During an Emergency (Maryland Essential Workers’ Protection Act)

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to numerous unprecedented challenges for essential employers and our frontline workforce, with substantial impacts to our food supply chain. As an employer of nearly 2,200 people in Maryland and a proud member of this community for more than 100 years, Perdue understands legislators’ desire to put in place new measures to ensure our state economy is resilient and workers are protected in the event of another catastrophic event of this magnitude. We share this desire and strive to support these same goals in our everyday operations.

That’s why, when this pandemic began nearly a year ago, Perdue Farms acted quickly by taking the following measures and more:

- Extending the hours of our **onsite Wellness Centers**, which are available at our processing facilities, staffed with local healthcare providers, and available to all associates and their families free of charge.
- Conducting **coronavirus testing** at all Perdue facilities, managed through our Wellness Centers in partnership with local health officials and/or healthcare providers, depending on the location.
- **Checking the temperature** of everyone entering any of our locations, using infrared non-contact temperature devices.

- Providing **disposable masks** at all of our locations to our own associates, contractors, federal food safety inspectors, and anyone permitted to enter our facilities.
- Installing **temporary plexiglass or plastic dividers** between associates on production lines, where social distancing is more difficult.
 - The stainless elements are welded versus bolted to minimize potential pathogen harborage points.
 - The dividers are cleaned or replaced, depending on design, during breaks and between every shift.
- **Increasing our stringent cleaning and sanitation protocols.**
- **Encouraging associates to stay home** if they are not feeling well or think they might have been exposed to the virus.
- **Waiving the 5-day waiting period of short-term disability** for any associate who contracts COVID-19, so that he or she can receive immediate benefits.
- Temporarily **raised pay by \$1-per-hour** for associates and added a **\$40-per-week pay increase for truck drivers** and other piece rate associates.
- **Paying annual bonuses to eligible employees two months early**, and adjusting the criteria to allow even more associates to receive a bonus.
- Temporarily **removing the PTO accrual maximum** for all associates.
 - This allows associates to continue accruing PTO weekly/biweekly past the maximum amount, and extending the deadline to utilize the days over their PTO maximum.
- **Hosting CDC tours** of multiple facilities; [“best-in-class” reviews](#)

Unfortunately, we have significant concerns about Maryland House Bill 581 and whether it would in fact achieve the intended outcomes. We welcome a conversation with legislators and the community about learnings from this pandemic and how they might inform other policies.

For more information, please contact Dick Willey at (410) 430-5628 or dick.willey@perdue.com.