

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 20, 2014

The Honorable Thomas Perez
Secretary of Labor
Frances Perkins Building
200 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington D.C. 20210

Dear Secretary Perez,

We write to express serious concern over the use of child laborers on tobacco farms. A deeply troubling May 2014 report from Human Rights Watch (HRW) chronicled the plight of children as young as 12 working on tobacco farms. Nearly three-quarters of the children interviewed by HRW reported suffering from nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, headaches, dizziness, skin rashes, difficulty breathing, and irritation of the eye and mouth. These symptoms are consistent with acute nicotine poisoning. A recent article in the *New York Times* profiled a 13-year old girl in North Carolina who wears garbage bags to protect herself from tobacco leaves during her 12-hour shift working a tobacco field. This protection from green tobacco sickness imposes its own hazard due to the risk of heat illness. Indeed, many of the children reported working 10-12 hour shifts often in the sweltering heat, and were not provided with regular breaks.

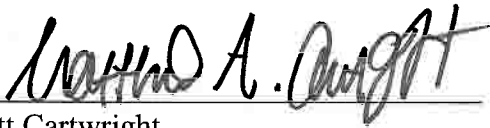
Over half the children interviewed by Human Rights Watch reported being exposed to toxic pesticides, which have been shown to cause cancer, depression, neurological deficits and reproductive health problems. As you know, children aged 12 and over may work on any farm without hourly restrictions outside of school hours. In other sectors, children under age 14 are prohibited from working at all, and children aged 14 and 15 are limited in the number of hours they may work. Current law allows 16 and 17-year-olds to work on farms under hazardous conditions, while the minimum age elsewhere is 18. Unfortunately, the Department's regulations on hazardous restrictions allows children over age 12 to perform work which puts them in contact with tobacco plants and leaves.

Three years ago, then Secretary Hilda Solis proposed a rule to update the list of hazardous occupations to effectively ban additional heavy machinery, working in silos and grain storage facilities, handling all pesticides, and working in the production of tobacco, among other things. The Department later withdrew those proposed changes. We urge you to issue a proposed rule

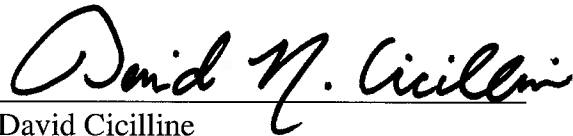
dealing solely with child labor on tobacco farms which would prohibit children from working in the cultivation or curing of tobacco.

Tobacco industry leaders already support a stronger approach. The Kentucky-based Council on Burley Tobacco, which represents 5,000 tobacco growers in four states, adopted a policy in July stating that it “does not condone the hiring of anyone under the age of 16 for work in tobacco anywhere in the world.” Major tobacco companies such as Philip Morris International (PMI) have stated that they would welcome a strengthening of the US regulatory framework regarding children working in tobacco.

Children working in tobacco are among the nation’s most vulnerable and we must do more to protect them. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing from you on this issue and to working with you in the near future.



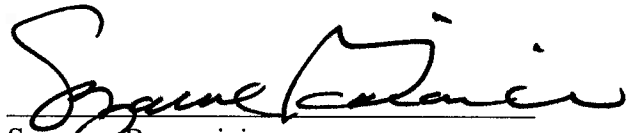
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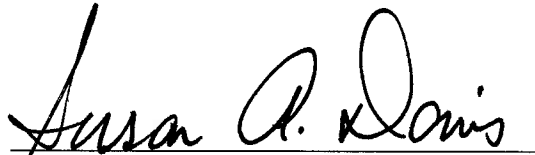
Tim Bishop
Member of Congress



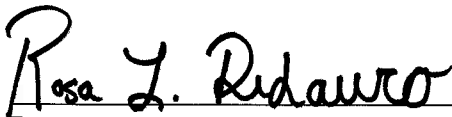
Suzanne Bonamici
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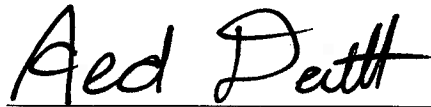
John Conyers
Member of Congress



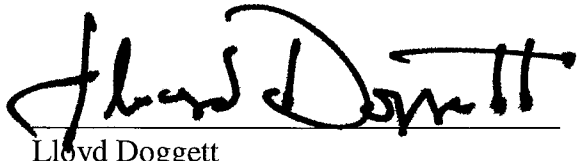
Susan Davis
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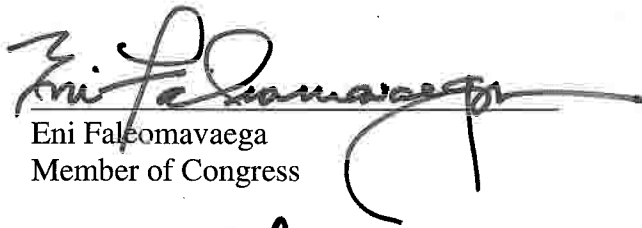
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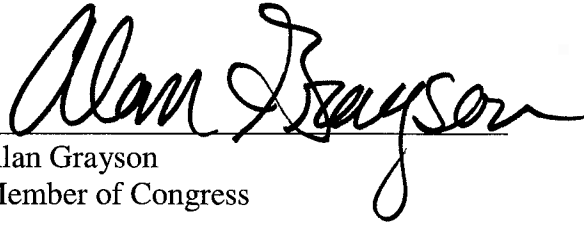
Lloyd Doggett
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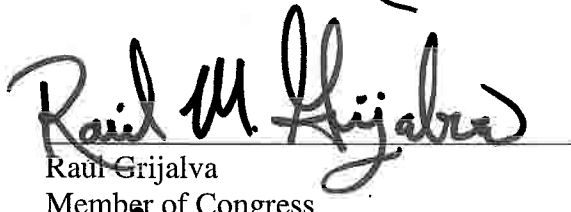
Keith Ellison
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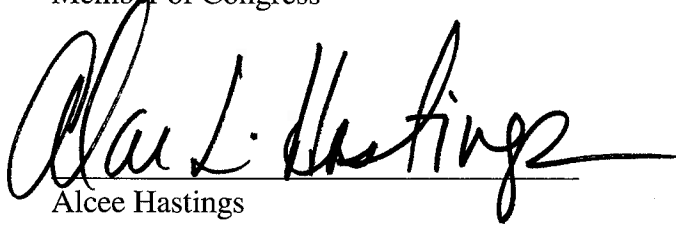
Alan Grayson
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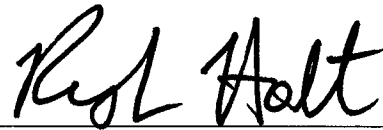
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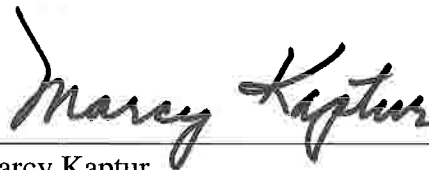
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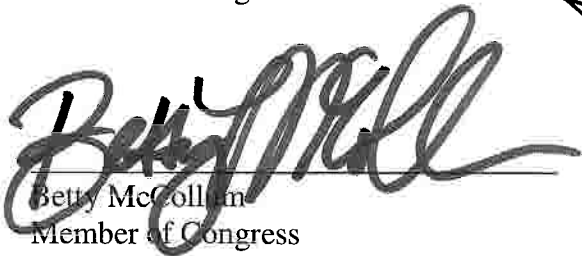
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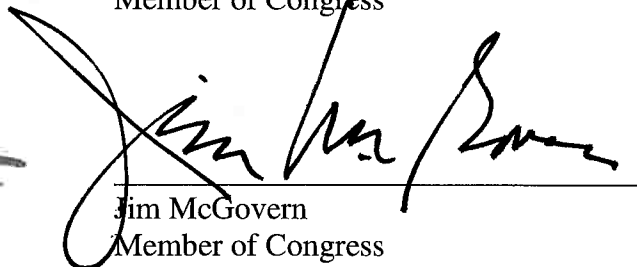
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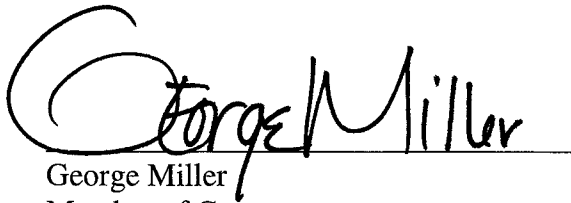
Marcy Kaptur
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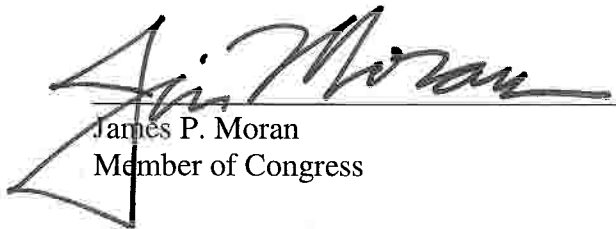
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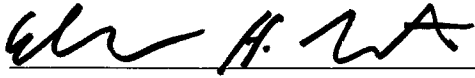
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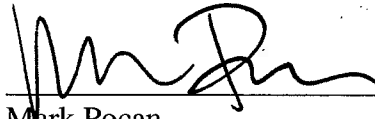
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James P. Moran
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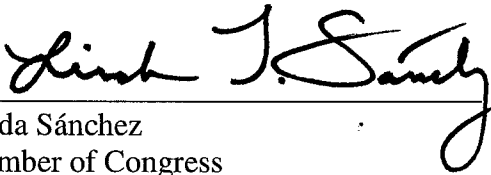
Mark Pocan
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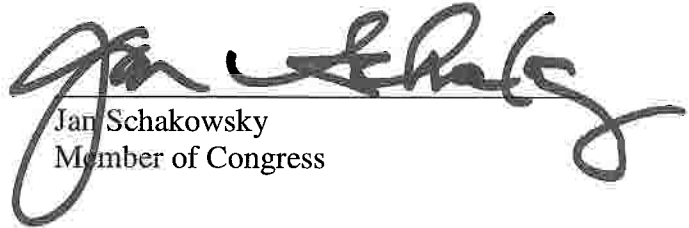
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Linda Sánchez
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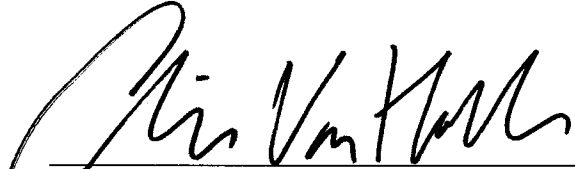
Jan Schakowsky
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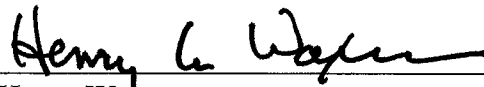
Adam Schiff
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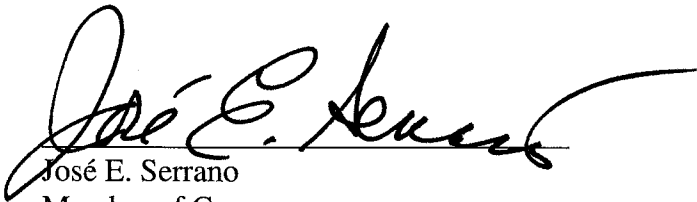
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Chris Van Hollen
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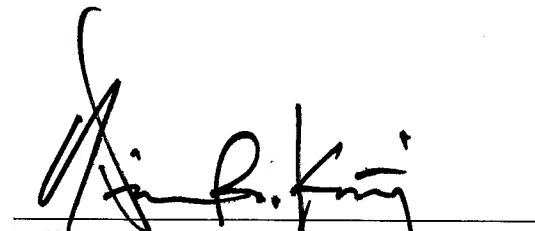
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