

CYNTHIA AXNE
3RD DISTRICT, IOWA

COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES
INVESTOR PROTECTION, ENTREPRENEURSHIP,
AND CAPITAL MARKETS
HOUSING, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
AND INSURANCE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
COMMODITY EXCHANGES, ENERGY, AND CREDIT
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

WASHINGTON, DC OFFICE
330 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-5476

DES MOINES OFFICE
400 EAST COURT AVE., SUITE 346
DES MOINES, IA 50309
(515) 400-8180

COUNCIL BLUFFS OFFICE
501 5TH AVE
COUNCIL BLUFFS, IA 51503
(712) 890-3117

CRESTON OFFICE
208 WEST TAYLOR
CRESTON, IA 50801
(515) 400-8180

May 19, 2020

Commissioner Rod Roberts
Iowa Division of Labor
150 Des Moines Street
Des Moines, IA 50309

cc: Governor Kim Reynolds

Commissioner Roberts:

I write today greatly concerned about a report of Iowa Occupational Safety Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) not thoroughly investigating a worker complaint concerning COVID-19 at a meat processing plant in Perry, Iowa.

After the complaint was filed on April 11, Iowa OSHA reportedly took nine days to seek a response from the plant. After the plant responded with e-mailed answers, the case was closed without an on-site inspection or further follow-up. During that time, plants were being shut down around Iowa and the country. Days later, the public learned that there was an outbreak resulting in over 700 positive cases of COVID-19 at the Perry plant. It is clear the investigation conducted by Iowa OSHA was severely lacking.

The novel coronavirus has presented many challenges and unprecedented situations. However, Iowa OSHA has an obligation to ensure safe and healthful working conditions for Iowa's workers, and by extension their families and communities. Reports that this complaint took weeks to investigate, did not result in an on-site inspection, and was closed based solely on information provided by the employer are profoundly distressing. Iowans are going to depend on Iowa OSHA as our economy tests its ability to safely reopen; therefore, the public must know why a direct complaint of unsafe conditions failed to produce any confirmation of an outbreak we now know to have spread to more than half of this plant's workers.

I respectfully ask that you conduct an investigation into how Iowa OSHA handled this specific worker complaint and publicly report the results. I would ask the investigation and report be focused on a few key questions:

1. What steps does Iowa OSHA follow upon receiving a worker complaint to closing it?
2. Why did it take Iowa OSHA nine days to seek an answer from the plant?
 - a. If this is standard, will Iowa OSHA make changes to assure the public of a rapid response during a public health emergency?

3. What information did Iowa OSHA gather to inform the investigation?
 - a. Did OSHA verify the e-mailed information from the plant?

4. If complaints of COVID-19 do not normally result in on-site inspections, what would trigger an inspection and why did the investigation fail to meet that standard?

With many businesses re-opening across the state, Iowans need to be assured that issues of workplace safety will be taken seriously, investigated swiftly, and inspected thoroughly. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Cindy Axne
Member of Congress