



INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE

2020

*Re: Request to cosponsor the PRIME Act, H.R. 2859/ S. 1620*

Dear Member of Congress:

The Institute for Justice (IJ) asks you to please support the PRIME Act, H.R. 2859/ S. 1620, or support its inclusion in the COVID-19 legislation currently under consideration. The PRIME Act would allow ranchers and farmers to slaughter and process their livestock at local slaughterhouses instead of driving hours away to USDA-approved slaughterhouses—many of which are not even open during the COVID-19 pandemic. The PRIME Act currently has dozens of cosponsors and we hope that you will be considering adding your name as well. If passed, the PRIME Act would relieve our nation's meat shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic, help small ranchers and farmers, allow consumers to buy local, and promote animal welfare—all while maintaining a safe food supply.

The Institute for Justice is a national nonprofit, civil rights law firm that has fought for people's individual rights for the last 30 years, including the right to sell, buy, grow, and eat the food of their choice. We have worked with thousands of farmers, small businesses, and individuals to change 11 state laws that restrict the sale of homemade food, and our work has been covered nationwide, including in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. IJ has also worked to change laws restricting people's ability to grow food on their own property, share food with the homeless, and sell food without using misleading labels.

We now ask you to support the PRIME Act. Under current federal law, ranchers and farmers can only slaughter and process their livestock at USDA-inspected slaughterhouse facilities or less frequently, a state-inspected facility that manages to meet the USDA's extensive requirements. Only about 50 USDA-inspected slaughterhouses are responsible for 98 percent of the Country's meat production. Typically, livestock owners have to book appointments six months in advance and then drive their animals hours—often across state lines—to get to these slaughterhouses, which is very difficult for the owners and extremely stressful for the animals.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed a major weakness in this system. Because there are so few slaughterhouses, even closing one can cause chaos, which is exactly what is happening now. Several USDA-inspected slaughterhouses shut down after they became hotbeds for coronavirus infections. As a result, many ranchers and farmers have nowhere to take their livestock and have had to euthanize millions of animals. Not only does this jeopardize these livestock owners' ability to support themselves and their families, but it has caused a national meat shortage. Americans struggle to find meat at the store and must pay more for it.

The PRIME Act would address these problems. It would allow ranchers and farmers to slaughter and process their livestock at custom slaughterhouses, which are small-scale facilities that exist in many communities—often only a few miles away. Custom slaughterhouses are already used for meat that is for a livestock owner’s personal consumption or for his or her employees and guests. Many ranchers and farmers also use custom slaughterhouses for animals that they partially own with their customers. The PRIME Act would expand the use of custom slaughterhouses to allow them to be used for meat that is sold directly to any customer and also to retailers, as long as the sales are within the state.

Using custom slaughterhouses would not jeopardize safety. While custom slaughterhouses have different standards than USDA-approved slaughterhouses, it makes sense to have different standards for a small facility than an industrial plant. These custom slaughterhouses have been safely used for decades, are regularly inspected, and have to abide by state law. Moreover, if this bill passes, states would be free to impose stricter inspection and safety requirements on these slaughterhouses. The PRIME Act would simply reduce federal regulation and leave regulation up to the states. A similar regulatory regime already exists for poultry, as federal law exempts farmers slaughtering up to 20,000 birds on their own farms, and these farmers have safely sold their poultry to in-state consumers and retailers for the last 40 years.

Allowing slaughter at custom slaughterhouses would be good for ranchers and farmers. If the PRIME Act passes, livestock owners could take their animals to nearby custom facilities and develop a personal relationship with the owners and employees of the facility. Many livestock owners have already developed these personal and trusting relationships. These local custom slaughterhouses know they are accountable to their customers, who can choose to go elsewhere. In addition, if this bill passes, many more custom facilities will open to satisfy the new demand—creating new jobs and spurring local economies in the process.

The PRIME Act would also be good for consumers. Not only would the PRIME Act relieve the nation’s meat shortage, but it would allow consumers to buy meat directly from their community. Under current law, a person cannot buy locally processed burger patties or sausage, unless they are willing to purchase part ownership of an animal and store hundreds of pounds of meat in their freezer. Most consumers instead purchase meat that has traveled hundreds of miles before arriving on their plate. The PRIME Act would make it easier for consumers to buy meat from farmers and ranchers that they can talk to. The PRIME Act would also help local food deserts, many of which ironically exist in farming and rancher communities.

Local slaughterhouses are also often better for animals. Forcing animals to travel hours in hot trailers is the most traumatic part of the slaughtering process. It is also stressful for the animals to be kept in crowded holding pens at USDA-approved slaughterhouses. And this imposed stress detracts from the taste and quality of the meat. This stress is significantly reduced if the animals only have to travel just a few miles down the road to a custom slaughterhouse. These small, custom facilities also allow livestock owners to supervise the process and even lead their own animals to slaughter, which many owners prefer.

We thus request that you support and sponsor the PRIME Act. We would be happy to discuss this with you further and address any questions. You can contact our Legislative Counsel Meagan Forbes at [mforbes@ij.org](mailto:mforbes@ij.org) or Senior Attorney Erica Smith at [esmith@ij.org](mailto:esmith@ij.org).

Respectfully,



Meagan Forbes  
Legislative Counsel  
[mforbes@ij.org](mailto:mforbes@ij.org)



Erica Smith  
Senior Attorney  
[esmith@ij.org](mailto:esmith@ij.org)