

August 5, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

On behalf of the nearly 6.4 million combined U.S. members and supporters of the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health (National COSH), Public Citizen, and the 74 other undersigned worker safety and health, labor, good government, community, public health, environmental, and public interest groups, we urge you to reject proposed FY 16 funding cuts for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA).

Each year 4,500 workers are killed on the job. Over three million suffer serious occupational injuries, and 50,000 die of occupational illnesses attributable to past workplace exposure to hazardous agents. The cost of job injuries and illnesses is enormous—estimated at \$250 billion to \$360 billion a year.

Yet FY 2016 House and Senate Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bills both fund OSHA and MSHA at levels lower than their FY 15 enacted budgets and significantly below your proposed FY 16 budget. The Senate bill (S. 1695) would cut MSHA funding by approximately \$19 million and would cut OSHA funding by nearly \$28 million or around 5 percent from current funding levels. The House bill (H.R. 3020) cuts OSHA funding by \$18 million, or around 3 percent.

These are devastating cuts to agencies that are already radically underfunded. As it is, there is only enough capacity for the average workplace to see an inspector every 99 years thanks to low staffing and incessantly inadequate budgets.

Both bills also contain “poison pill” policy riders that would put American workers at further risk of death and injury. The Senate bill blocks the use of funds to promulgate or implement regulations relating to occupational exposure to silica until additional studies and reports are completed. Approximately 2.2 million American workers are exposed to this hazard, which has [contributed to the deaths of 1,437 Americans](#) from silicosis between 2001 and 2010. The current silica standard dates back to 1971. After decades, [study after study and numerous delays](#), OSHA finally [issued a proposed standard](#) in 2013, and held extensive public hearings last year. OSHA estimates that the new standard will save nearly 700 lives and prevent 1,600 new cases of silicosis per year once the full effects of the rule are realized.

The new rule did not come soon enough for Chris Johnson, a bricklayer from New York who was diagnosed with acute silicosis, at the age of 30. Doctors have told him his life expectancy is 45; he’s 41

now. A science-based standard that has been continually delayed at the cost of thousands of lives shouldn't be held up any longer by budget machinations.

The House bill would de-fund the OSHA Susan Harwood Training Grant Program, a key component in support of OSHA's mission to ensure safe and healthful working conditions for American workers. The Susan Harwood program provides grants to non-profit organizations to train workers and employers on the recognition, avoidance, and prevention of safety and health hazards in their workplaces. The program targets audiences who might otherwise not receive training, including small business workers and employers, hard-to-reach or low-literacy workers, and especially workers in vulnerable and high-hazard industries. Since 1978, over 1.8 million workers have been trained through this program.

During 2013, OSHA clarified that workers at a site without a collective bargaining agreement may designate a third party to represent them during "walkaround inspections" when in OSHA's view the representative will make a positive contribution to the inspection. This clarification is consistent with the legislative history of the OSH Act which shows Congress' intent to involve employee representatives in workplace inspections. The House bill would prohibit OSHA inspectors from implementing any agency policy allowing third parties to accompany compliance officers on an inspection without a vote of approval by the employees.

We again urge you to veto any appropriation bills that contain these proposed cuts and policy riders. If these budget cuts are enacted, we will lose the worker safety and health improvements we've made over the years as well as the opportunity for new achievements, and instead bear more worker injuries and deaths and higher economic and social costs in the long run.

Sincerely,

National Council for Occupational Safety and Health
Public Citizen
Alaska Marine Safety Education Association
American Federation of Government Employees, Local 948
Asian Immigrant Women Advocates
Bernabei & Wachtel
BlueGreen Alliance
Boat People SOS
Brazilian Worker Center
California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative
Casa Latina
Center for Effective Government
Center for Progressive Reform
Connecticut Council on Occupational Safety & Health
District 1199C National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, AFSCME
District 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund

Equality State Policy Center
Farmworker Association of Florida
Farmworker Justice
Fey y Justicia Worker Center
Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives
Grain Handling Safety Coalition
Greenpeace
Health Professionals and Allied Employees, AFT, AFL-CIO
Hesperian Health Guides
Interfaith Worker Justice
International Chemical Workers Union Council
Jobs with Justice of East Tennessee
Knox Area Workers' Memorial Day Committee
Labor & Employment Committee, National Lawyers Guild
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, AFL-CIO
Labor Occupational Health Program, UC Berkeley
LAGAI -- Queer Insurrection (SF Bay Area)
Legal Aid Justice Center
Local 1, University Professional and Technical Employees (UPTE-CWA 9119, AFL-CIO)
Local 7, University Professional and Technical Employees (UPTE-CWA 9119, AFL-CIO)
Maine Labor Group on Health
Make the Road New York
Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety & Health
Mid-State Education and Service Foundation
National Day Laborer Organizing Network
National Economic & Social Rights Initiative
National Healthy Nail and Beauty Salon Alliance
National Nurses United
National Staffing Workers Alliance
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest
New Hampshire Coalition for Occupational Safety & Health
New Jersey Work Environment Council
New Solutions
New York Committee for Occupational Safety & Health
New York State Nurses Association
North East New York Committee on Occupational Safety & Health
North West Arkansas Workers' Justice Center
Philadelphia Area Project on Occupational Safety & Health
Public Justice Center
Restaurant Opportunities Centers United
Rhode Island Committee on Occupational Safety & Health

Roofers and Waterproofers Research and Education Joint Trust
SafeWork
San Francisco Bay Area Physicians for Social Responsibility
Southern California Coalition for Occupational Safety & Health
State Building and Construction Trades Council of California, AFL-CIO
The Center for Health, Work and Environment, Colorado School of Public Health
Training for Development of Innovative Control Technologies Project
United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America
United Food and Commercial Workers
United Support & Memorial for Workplace Fatalities
United Union of Roofers, Waterproofers and Allied Workers
Voces de la Frontera
Western Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety & Health
Western New York Council on Occupational Safety & Health
Women's Voices for the Earth
Worker Defense Project
Workplace Fairness
Worksafe

CC: Senator Thad Cochran, Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
Senator Barbara A. Mikulski, Vice Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
Congressman Harold Rogers, Chair, House Appropriations Committee
Congresswoman Nita M. Lowey, Ranking Democrat, House Appropriations Committee