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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

May 9, 2015

Dr. David Michaels
Assistant Secretary of Labor
Occupational Safety & Health Administration
200 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Dr. Michaels:

Congress created the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) in 1970 in order to "assure safe and healthful working conditions." Out of an interest in assisting with that mission, I am deeply concerned with recent media reports shedding light on the dangerous working conditions experienced by those in the nail salon industry.

Research and investigated news accounts link prolonged exposure to nail salon chemicals to cancer, severe respiratory diseases, and debilitating skin disorders. The workers – the vast majority of whom are women – also report comparatively high numbers of miscarriages, which are devastating to them and their families and have prevented many of them from becoming mothers. For those who do become pregnant, many mothers discover their children are physically or cognitively delayed as a possible result of the conditions experienced in their work environments. According to news reports, physicians around the country are urging these workers to change jobs to save their health.

More must be done to help these workers. As you have appropriately acknowledged, OSHA's safety standards regarding chemical exposure levels for manicurists need revision. According to OSHA, workers "can be exposed to levels that are legal...but are still dangerous." Yet, you have admitted that your agency's ability to protect workers was undercut by your internal rule-making process. This is simply unacceptable.

Nail salon workers are some of our workforce's most vulnerable, as recent media reports have also indicated they are often underpaid and economically exploited. These exploitations make it nearly impossible for nail salon workers to demand better conditions. We must be their voice in making sure this industry isn't putting profits ahead of its workers' wellbeing.

OSHA must improve working conditions for these workers and I stand ready to be your partner in Congress on this effort. I look forward to hearing from you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

KATHLEEN M. RICE
Member of Congress

