



CITY OF MILWAUKEE

City Hall, 200 E. Wells Street, Milwaukee, WI 53202 • www.city.milwaukee.gov

April 30, 2020

Silence from Cudahy, Smithfield Foods could be deadly

Statement from Alderman José G. Pérez, Alderwoman JoCasta Zamarripa and Alderwoman Marina Dimitrijevic

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There are no walls that separate the communities of Milwaukee County from one another. Even if there were, the COVID-19 virus wouldn't pay any attention to them.

This is what makes the slow reaction and continued silence from both Patrick Cudahy/Smithfield Foods and the City of Cudahy about the outbreak at the former's meat processing plant so troubling.

The employees at that plant deserved the best care and consideration possible when the virus was discovered there – if not because they are an important part of our nation's food supply then because they dedicated themselves to their employer and were on the job working when many others were able to shelter at home. They should not have been sent to seek treatment and testing in their home communities, but should have been immediately and appropriately taken care of by their employer in the interest of public safety.

The urgency is critical because many of these employees live on the near south side of Milwaukee, in the 53215 ZIP code which is home to one of the most diverse areas in the great state of Wisconsin and one of the recent COVID-19 hotspots in the city. With so many calling for a broad, coordinated response to this problem, it is disappointing to see what appear to be parochial concerns standing in the way of an appropriate response in the interest of public health.

To help repair the damage done, Smithfield Foods must prepare a comprehensive action plan to respond to this and future outbreaks. It must communicate that plan to local health officials. It must further open up lines of communication with its employees and keep them updated as to the plan itself and how it is implemented. This information must be made available to employees in both English and Spanish.

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Smithfield should also give serious consideration to a complete shutdown of this operation until all – all – employees are tested and the extent of the outbreak is known. Its action plan should include provision for compensation to all front-line employees during this shutdown.

If we are to move forward and re-open our economy and our communities, we must do so together.

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