

Re: Opposition to H 7946

Dear Chair Solomon, First Vice Chair O'Brien, Second Vice Chair Caldwell, and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

On behalf of The Humane League and our Rhode Island supporters, I am writing to express our strong opposition to H 7946, which aims to delay the implementation date for cage-free housing for egg-laying hens from 2026 to 2034. We applaud the Rhode Island General Assembly for enacting cage-free legislation in 2018, and we urge you to uphold the original timeline and keep the 2026 effective date as it was passed.

Rhode Island's cage-free law was passed six years ago and provided a farmer-friendly timeline of eight years for producers to come into compliance. Delaying the transition to cage-free housing would prolong unnecessary animal suffering. The current standard practice of confining egg-laying hens in cramped cages denies them the opportunity to engage in natural behaviors, leading to immense physical and psychological distress.

Additionally, there is overwhelming support for cage-free eggs among Rhode Island consumers. Driven by concerns about animal welfare, food safety, and environmental sustainability, the demand for eggs sourced from cage-free systems continues to grow. Rhode Island residents increasingly seek out cage-free eggs as they align with their values and preferences for ethical and humane food choices.

Consumers deserve access to eggs that meet high safety and quality standards. Cage-free production systems have been shown to yield eggs with lower risks of contamination by pathogens such as Salmonella, thereby reducing public health risks associated with egg consumption. Extensive research shows that locking hens in cages increases the risk of Salmonella contamination, a bacteria that can be lethal, especially in children and the elderly. By maintaining the original implementation date of 2026 for cage-free housing, we can ensure that consumers have access to eggs that prioritize both animal welfare and food safety considerations.

Delaying the transition to cage-free housing until 2034 would undermine our collective efforts to advance animal welfare, food safety, and consumer choice. More than 200 of the country's largest food companies have committed to switching to a 100 percent cage-free egg supply. This includes Burger King, Unilever, General Mills, Aramark, Costco, and Target. In February, McDonald's, which purchases roughly 2 billion eggs annually, announced that 100% of eggs served at all of its U.S. locations come from cage-free birds. We urge you to stand on the side of compassion and progress by opposing H 7946 and advocating for the original implementation date, 2026, for cage-free egg production.

For these reasons, we kindly ask that you vote no on H 7946. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Conor Lamkin
Assistant Policy Counsel
The Humane League