

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

July 16, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We again write to express our opposition to your proposal to reorganize USDA, specifically the proposal that would relocate the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) away from the National Capital Region to Kansas City.

These agencies are national research institutions that provide vital information on national and local issues that are critically important to farmers, families, and rural communities. In order to provide this world-class research, ERS and NIFA need to be able to coordinate with other U.S. statistical agencies as well as other stakeholders that are connected to on the ground efforts, which are headquartered in the National Capital Region. We remain concerned that this restructuring will gut the ability of these agencies to successfully carry out their important missions. We also remain concerned that the quality of work being done at ERS and NIFA has already been undermined and will continue to degrade.

In particular, data compiled by American Federal Government Employees Local 3403, as part of a summary of all employees, found that ERS could expect more than 4 out of 5 of its more than 200 employees and more than 90% of NIFA's more than 300 employees to decline reassignment to the temporary offices in Kansas City, and instead seek employment elsewhere. With such a high rate of projected attrition, this move will have catastrophic impacts on the scientific capabilities of USDA, thereby hurting the farmers, families, and rural communities who benefit from the important work of these agencies.

While we oppose entirely the relocation and will continue to work to stop this move, we write today with two principal requests on which we ask for your immediate response.

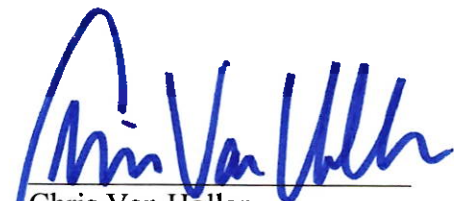
First, it is our understanding that AFGE Local 3403 sent a letter to USDA requesting an extension of the July 15 deadline to accept or decline the employee reassignment to Kansas City. The union issued a demand to bargain on June 18, and requested to meet on June 24 to begin bargaining. However, ERS and USDA management and labor relations officials refused to meet before July 15. Working out some issues with the union would help to ensure more employees can make an informed decision about whether to relocate, potentially mitigating at least some of the serious damage that this move will do to the ability of these agencies to carry out their missions. We understand that in your view, July 15 was a preliminary deadline, and

that the final deadline is September 30. Can you confirm that the deadline for employees to accept or decline reassignment to Kansas City is now September 30?

Second, the General Services Administration recently extended the deadline by one month for Kansas City real estate companies to submit bids to hold the future lease for the ERS and NIFA. It is our understanding that the process of securing and building out a new space in Kansas City could take up to two years. This predicament makes it nearly impossible for your employees to determine where they will be living, where to send their children to school, and other important decisions until they know where the final office space will be located in Kansas City. Will you also commit to utilizing available office space and teleworking capabilities to keep your employees in the National Capital Region unless and until a final office space is completed and ready for occupancy in Kansas City?

We know you care deeply about improving customer service at the Department; however, customers cannot be served if there are not an adequate number of employees to get the job done. Thank you for your prompt attention to these urgent matters that are of critical importance to our farmers, families, and rural communities.


Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senate




Debbie Stabenow
United States Senate



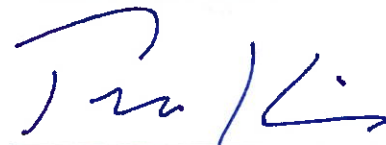
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senate




Patty Murray
United States Senate



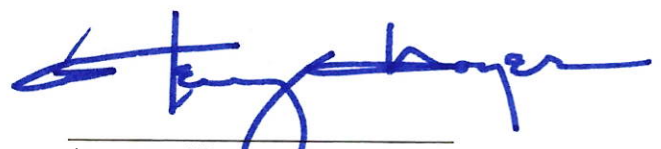
Mark R. Warner
United States Senate



Tim Kaine
United States Senate



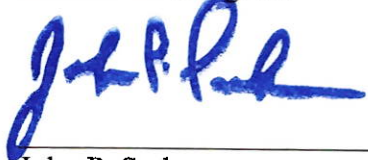
Sherrod Brown
United States Senate



Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



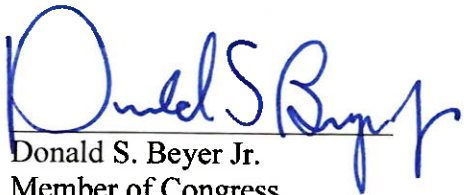
John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress



Eleanor H. Norton
Member of Congress



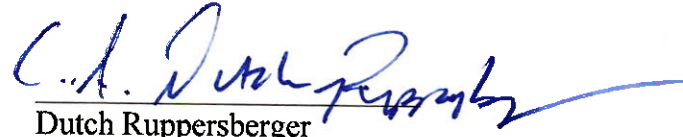
Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



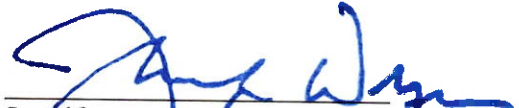
Marcia L. Fudge
Member of Congress



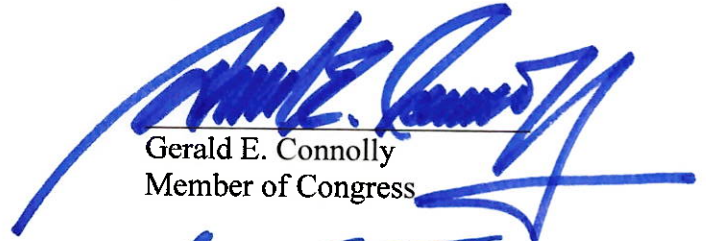
Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress



Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress



Jennifer Wexton
Member of Congress



Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



David Trone
Member of Congress