

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 24, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Shelby, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Granger:

As the House and Senate negotiate the final Fiscal Year 2020 funding bill, we urge you to include provisions from the House-passed Agriculture and Financial Services bills which ensure that no funding may be used to relocate U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) research agencies out of the National Capital Region. Maintaining these provisions would ensure that the vital research from several USDA scientific agencies remains connected to the National Capital Region and that they are able to maintain mission continuity and delivery of mission-critical work.

In August 2018, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture announced the relocation of two national research agencies, the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), outside of the National Capital Region. Section 717(a) of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 prohibited the expenditure of funds for the relocation unless the Appropriations Committees were given written notice and provided approval to the Department. In an August 2019 report from the Inspector General of the Department of Agriculture, the Inspector General concluded that the USDA had not received Congressional approval as required under law for the move.


As a result, the USDA has moved forward with expediting the relocation of these agencies without approval from House and Senate appropriations committees, and employees of these agencies were given 33 days to decide whether they would accept relocation to a temporary location in Kansas City or lose their position. Although the USDA has granted requests for employees to telework on a case-by-case basis through the end of the year, as of September 30th just sixteen ERS employees and forty-five NIFA employees have relocated to Kansas City.

With only a fraction of reassigned employees opting to relocate, we are extremely concerned that moving forward with this relocation will increasingly jeopardize ERS and NIFA's ability to continue their critical work as well as cause irreparable harm to the federal scientific workforce. USDA is now delaying the publication of dozens of research reports and, in some cases, will be forced to abandon them completely. There are also reports of NIFA funds remaining unobligated, despite research institutions being notified of their grant approvals. Other reports indicate universities, such as the 1890s Land-Grant Universities, are losing dedicated NIFA staff to assist in the management of federal programs that address current issues facing the agriculture industry as well as issues affecting land-grant universities. This will ultimately harm the American public, with the greatest impact being felt by the farming community.


The relocation is opposed by the National Farmers Union and the American Federation of Government Employees, as well as a broad coalition of stakeholders, including Union of Concerned Scientists, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Agricultural & Applied Economics Association, National Organic Farming Association, the American Statistical Association, and several land-grant universities.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.


Sincerely,



Jennifer Wexton
Member of Congress




Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator




Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress




Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator




Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



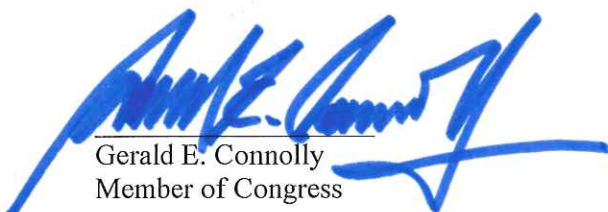
Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Anthony Brown
Member of Congress



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



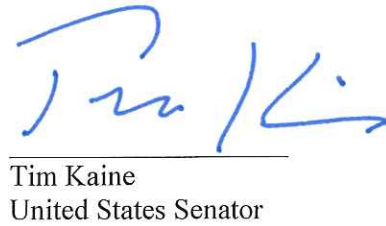
Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



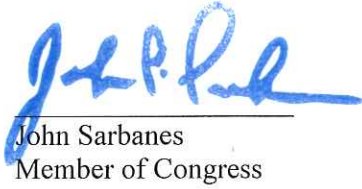
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



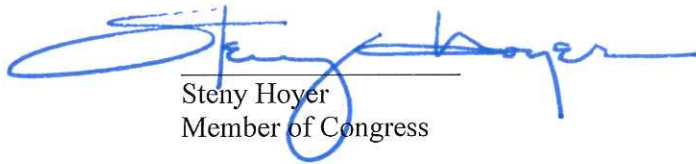
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



John Sarbanes
Member of Congress



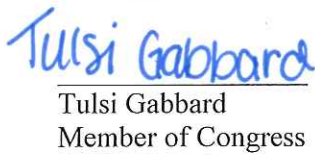
David Trone
Member of Congress



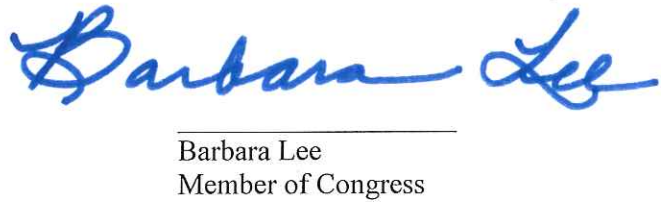
Steny Hoyer
Member of Congress



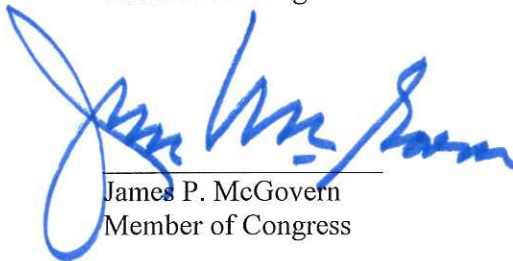
Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



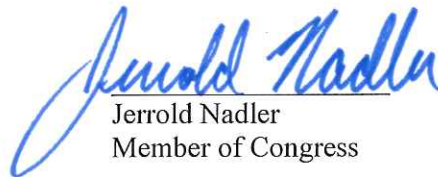
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Salud O. Carbajal
Member of Congress



Marcia L. Fudge
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



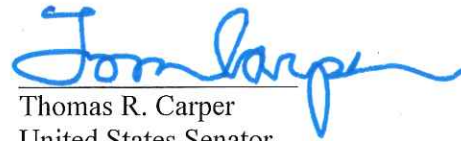
Peter Welch
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



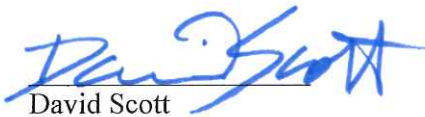
Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



Robert C. 'Bobby' Scott
Member of Congress



Alma S. Adams
Member of Congress



David Scott
Member of Congress



Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress



C.A. Dutch Ruppertsberger
Member of Congress

cc: Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government