

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 22, 2026

The Honorable Stephen Vaden
Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Tom Schultz
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Deputy Secretary Vaden and Chief Schultz,

On April 30, 2026, during the Senate Appropriations Committee hearing on the United States Forest Service (USFS) FY27 budget, Chief Schultz assured Senator Van Hollen that USFS would not force Baltimore Urban Field Office employees to relocate outside of the Baltimore area during the USDA reorganization. Despite this commitment, when USFS announced earlier this month that the Baltimore Urban Field Office will close, we learned that USFS intends to relocate Baltimore employees to Beltsville, Maryland – a location that is decidedly outside of the broader Baltimore area. USFS must make good on its word and keep Baltimore Urban Field Office employees in Baltimore so they can effectively continue their place-based and partnership-dependent work in the Baltimore area.

When Secretary Rollins announced the USDA reorganization, one of the stated pillars of the plan was to “bring USDA closer to its customers.” Closing the Baltimore Field Office and relocating employees away from Baltimore violates this core principle, since the primary “customers” of the USFS Baltimore Urban Field Office are in Baltimore; they are the community groups, local government, and academics with whom the Field Office has developed partnerships and collaborations during its nearly 40-year tenure on the campus of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. These relationships have enabled important research projects that benefit the Chesapeake Bay watershed and regional forests, as well as urban forestry projects in the Baltimore community. For example, the Office supports community-led restoration and urban revitalization efforts in Baltimore by leading the Baltimore Urban Waters Partnership. It delivers professional skill building and workforce training to urban youth in Baltimore by supporting youth forestry projects at the Stillmeadow Church and Peace Park. And it started an urban wood reuse project that successfully spun off into a city-run urban sawmill and wood recycling center.

USDA has continually failed to respond to basic questions about the Department’s decision-making during the reorganization process. This includes a failure to answer the questions included in the letter sent to you opposing the closure of the Baltimore Urban Field Office from April 24, 2026, such as whether a cost-benefit analysis has been conducted to understand the true costs to the American taxpayer of closing this facility. This lack of transparency is particularly disturbing when USDA maintains that the reorganization is meant to save money.

To add to this concern, there are clearly other suitable federal facilities for these employees in the Baltimore area. For example, there is a U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) facility that is located across the street from the Baltimore Urban Field Office that has the capacity to accommodate USFS employees - a facility that Chief Schultz mentioned during the April 30th hearing. The availability of other Baltimore locations to house the Baltimore Urban Field Office make it extremely difficult to understand why the Field Office's employees would need to be relocated outside of Baltimore, where it will be harder for them to effectively do their jobs and maintain critical partnerships in the community that this Field Office exists to serve.

In addition, while Beltsville may fall within the range of the Forest Service's expansive definition the Baltimore "commuting area," despite being well outside of the Baltimore area, relocating Field Office employees to Beltsville realistically means commutes of 2 hours or more for Baltimore-based employees who rely on public transit. This will keep employees away from their families for longer and create an additional cost burden for them – stressors that stand to decrease overall employee productivity and harm employee retention.

We urge you to keep your word and reverse course on the decision to relocate USFS Baltimore Field Office employees outside of Baltimore. In addition, please provide answers to the following questions by October 1, 2026:

1. Did USDA or USFS conduct an analysis of the costs and benefits associated with closing the Baltimore Urban Field Office as compared to keeping them in the current location?
 - a. If so, please provide that analysis, including details on the alternative locations that were considered for Baltimore Field Office employees.
2. Has USDA or USFS assessed the impact that closure of the USFS Baltimore Urban Field Office and relocation of employees outside of the Baltimore area will have on the important work that the Baltimore Urban Field Office has been conducting?
 - a. If so, please explain in detail how the assessment was conducted and what the findings were.
3. Did USDA or USFS assess the feasibility of co-locating the USFS Baltimore Urban Field Office with the nearby USGS facility that Chief Schultz referenced in the April 30th hearing?
4. Will employees still be able and expected to work on the ground in Baltimore?
 - a. If so, how will employee productivity be impacted by the relocation and what will the cost to USDA be, including lost work hours and travel expenses, from frequent employee travel from Beltsville to Baltimore?

The Baltimore location is critical to the ability of the Baltimore Urban Field Office to successfully accomplish its place-based and partnership-driven work. This work not only benefits the Baltimore community but serves as a model for urban forestry work in cities across the country and the world. The Baltimore Urban Field Office is an asset to the nation and its closure serves no one. Keep your word and keep the work of the Baltimore Urban Forestry Office in Baltimore.

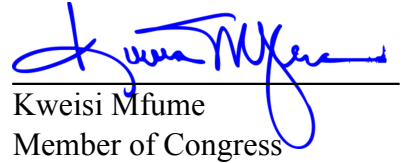
Sincerely,



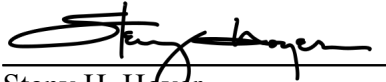
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator



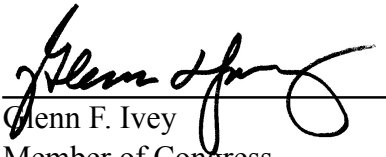
Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress



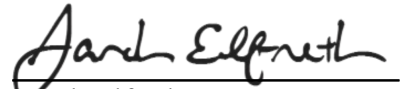
Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress



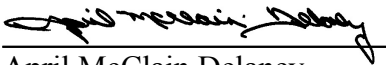
Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



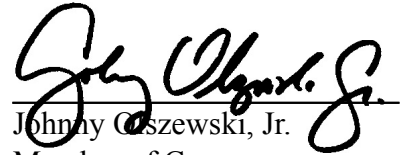
Glenn F. Ivey
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