



THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE
WASHINGTON, D. C.
20250-0100

July 24, 2019

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
United States Senate
110 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Van Hollen:

Thank you for your letter of July 16, 2019, cosigned by your colleagues, regarding the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) recent efforts to relocate the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) from the National Capital Region to the Kansas City Region.

The work of the skilled employees in ERS and NIFA is critical to the world's agriculture, but it does not need to occur from Washington to be effective. There is a significant presence of USDA and Federal Government employees in the region; this agriculture talent pool, in addition to multiple land-grant and research universities within driving distance, provides access to a stable labor force for the future. The move will place important USDA resources closer to many stakeholders, most of whom live and work outside of the Washington, D.C. area.

My goal is to make USDA the most effective, efficient and customer-focused department in the entire Federal Government. I believe that this decision will improve the great work done in both agencies.

Please see the following responses to your inquiries below:

1. The July 15, 2019 deadline was for employees to respond to the directed reassignment and that deadline did not get extended. The Agency is considering, on a case-by-case basis, requests for extensions on the basis of hardship that were received by the July 15, 2019 deadline.
2. The Agency is in discussions with the Union on its requests for workplace flexibilities during the transition; and a final determination has not been made. However, at a minimum we will follow existing Departmental policy and regulation on telework.

Thank you again for your note. With questions, please contact our Office of Congressional Relations at (202) 720-7095. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sonny Perdue".

Sonny Perdue
Secretary