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United States Senate

July 30, 2019

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

Thank you for your July 24, 2019 response to the July 16, 2019 letter sent by my colleagues and I regarding the relocation of two U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) agencies, the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food And Agriculture (NIFA). I would also like to thank you for taking the time to have a conversation with me over the phone on July 14, 2019.

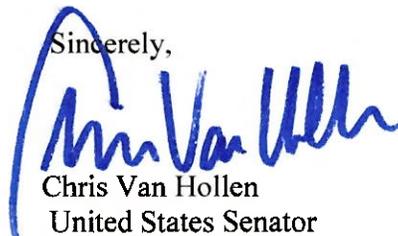
While I appreciated your willingness to speak on this issue, I was alarmed to see that your written response did not accurately reflect what we spoke about by phone on several important points. On the phone you told me that the July 15, 2019 deadline for employees to respond to reassignment to Kansas City was a soft deadline designed to give the USDA an idea for planning purposes about what the numbers would be and that employees would have until September 30, 2019 to change their minds one way or another. In other words, those who did not commit to staying by July 15, 2019 would have until September 30, 2019 to make a final decision and those who said they would stay could change their decision by September 30, 2019. You did not indicate that those choices could be denied by the Department.

Second, while you did not commit to allowing for employees to remain in the National Capital Region and potentially telework or use existing office space until a permanent site is completed and ready for occupancy in Kansas City, you indicated that the request seemed very reasonable and made common sense. What we got back in the letter was bureaucratic language that was entirely inconsistent with your expressions of good faith in our phone conversation.

It is unfortunate that what you say on the phone with Members of Congress gets revised by others at your Department. That is a breach of good faith.

I continue to strongly oppose the proposed move of ERS and NIFA employees to Kansas City and hope that we can find a path forward for more productive dialogue to do what is in the best interest of your employees—many of whom are my constituents.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

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