

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 23, 2019

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

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write to you as Members of the National Capital Region to express our profound concern about the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) decision to dramatically reduce Voluntary Separation Incentive Payments (VSIPs) offered to employees of the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) who have opted against relocating to the Kansas City Region.

On June 13th your agency informed ERS and NIFA employees of plans to offer VSIPs to those who separate "by Resignation, Optional Retirement or Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA)." You subsequently gave employees until July 15th to notify your agency of their intent to decline relocation orders. Employees were only given one week, from July 22nd through 29th, to apply for buyouts. This tight timeline imposed by your agency has naturally caused tremendous family strain and personal hardship.

Many of our constituents were counting on your agency to offer \$25,000 VSIPs— the maximum possible amount payable for a federal buyout. \$25,000 VSIPs would help offset the financial difficulties associated with being suddenly without a job, with being barred from the federal workforce for a period of five years after separation, and with having to relinquish priority for federal employment under the Career Transition Assistance Program (CTAP) and the Interagency Career Transition Assistance Program (ICTAP).

Inexplicably on August 20th, your agency informed employees that the buyout amount previously approved for all applicants "had changed from \$25,000 to \$10,000." Employees are now expected to decide by August 26th whether to accept their drastically reduced VSIPs. This sudden switch is plainly unconscionable and unacceptable.

We remain staunchly opposed to your agency's decision to relocate ERS and NIFA to the Kansas City Region. If, however, you proceed with this move, we urge you to offer the maximum allowable VSIPs so that your employees are not forced to endure further hardship. We request your immediate attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

Very truly yours,

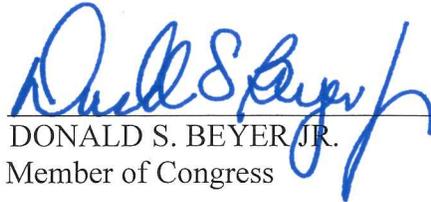
  
JAMIE RASKIN  
Member of Congress

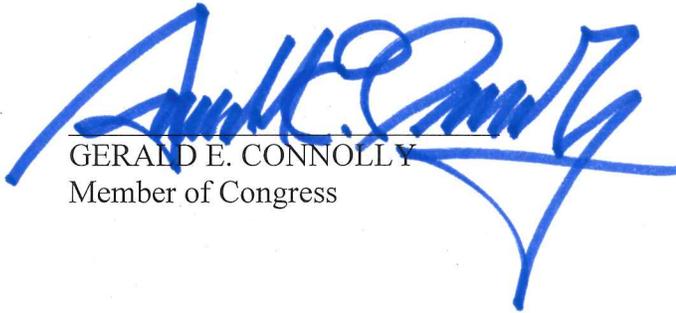
  
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