United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 24, 2026

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

Dear Deputy Secretary Vaden:

We write with significant concern regarding the reorganization of the Rural Development mission area at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Rural communities, small businesses, and families will lose access to important services if the proposed reorganization plan moves forward.

Rural Development is a unique division within the Department, supporting agriculture and ensuring that rural communities prosper by administering grants and loans to support rural businesses, providing financial support for rural housing, financing the construction of rural health clinics and daycare centers, and championing critical infrastructure projects for water, electric, or broadband.

In order for rural communities to benefit from these projects, the Rural Development agency must have the capacity to process applications and disburse funds. The mission area has already lost about 36 percent of its staff last year, with nearly a third of those who left having more than 20 years of USDA experience. The reorganization plan for Rural Development will result in even further cuts, with 60 percent of staff in the National Capital Region being required to relocate to St. Louis or Dallas.

Recent court filings reveal the intention of these relocations. Internal memos set a goal of reducing Rural Development staff by 50 percent, according to a March 13, 2025 Agency RIF and Reorganization Plan submission, achieved through forced relocations because the agency was "anticipating that a significant number of employees will decline geographic reassignments …."

Rural Development's depletion of staff has already left rural America without the support it needs as the prices of gas, groceries, and agricultural inputs are skyrocketing as a result of tariffs and foreign conflicts. Without adequate and expert staff, the money that Congress has appropriated to help rural communities will not reach its intended beneficiaries.

Please provide a response to the following requests about the planned reorganization by August 5, 2026:

1. What analysis did the Department conduct to determine the impacts of staffing cuts on delivering Rural Development services?

2. Please provide a current breakdown of staffing levels and projection of staffing for the next two years by sub-mission area.

3. Given the significant depletion of staff, is Rural Development hiring now or planning to recruit new staff in the next three months? If so, for what positions and where?

4. If USDA anticipates hiring new staff, how will the Department ensure they receive the training needed to effectively serve rural communities with the required expertise and level of service?

5. How does the USDA plan to successfully recruit the next generation of Rural Development employees?

6. While we appreciate the willingness to modernize Rural Development's technology, previous efforts have been unsuccessful and costly. How will the Department ensure that these technology projects remain within budget and on time? When will these new technologies be available to staff and customers?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

Peter Welch
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

Elissa Slotkin
United States Senator

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

Raphael Warnock
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator

Tina Smith
United States Senator

John Fetterman
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator