

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 21, 2025

THE HONORABLE BROOKE ROLLINS
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave
Washington, DC 20350

Dear Madam Secretary:

We write to urge your swift compliance with the orders issued by the United States District Court for the Northern District of California in *American Federation of Government Employees et al. v. United States Office of Personnel Management et al.* (25-1780) and by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) in *Special Counsel ex rel. John Doe v. Department of Agriculture* (CB-1208-25-0020-U-2) to reinstate terminated probationary employees at the Department of Agriculture (USDA), with specific emphasis on reinstalling agricultural inspectors with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). APHIS inspectors perform critical work protecting public health, ensuring food safety, and maintaining the integrity of the agricultural industry and economy, and we strongly urge every action to return USDA's animal and plant inspection processes to their full capacity.

APHIS agricultural inspectors work diligently to enforce Federal regulations and prevent the introduction of pests and diseases that have the potential to destabilize local ecosystems and threaten agricultural production. The negative economic and environmental impact of invasive species is well documented, especially in the Pacific region and in coastal communities that are at heightened risk of invasive species due to maritime trade.^{1,2} APHIS agricultural inspectors are critical to facilitating the secure exchange of agricultural goods while safeguarding against the significant threat posed by invasive species.

Following recommendations provided by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), the USDA terminated 5,692 probationary employees across the country.³ Reports indicate that APHIS experienced significant cuts to its workforce with over 200 employees with the plant protection and quarantine program dismissed from their posts.⁴ Even a temporary decrease in inspector capacity places our agricultural resources and food supply at increased risk of irreparable harm from invasive species, diseases, and other threats.

¹ "Economic and Social Impacts," National Invasive Species Information Center, March 18, 2025, <https://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/subject/economic-and-social-impacts>.

² "Invasive Species," National Parks Service, March 18, 2025, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/oceans/invasive-species.htm>.

³ "Secretary Rollins Takes Bold Action to Stop Wasteful Spending and Optimize USDA to Better Serve American Agriculture," Press Release, U.S. Department of Agriculture, February 14, 2025, <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/02/14/secretary-rollins-takes-bold-action-stop-wasteful-spending-and-optimize-usda-better-serve-american>.

⁴ Emily Anthes and Apoorva Mandavilli, "Mass Firings May Imperil Crops, Cattle and Pets," *The New York Times*, February 26, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/26/science/trump-plant-animal-health.html>.

These terminations were challenged in court and other administrative proceedings, and we appreciate your efforts to comply with recent decisions. On March 5, 2025, the U.S. Merit Systems Protections Board issued a 45-day stay on the termination of probationary employees. USDA subsequently announced plans to “place all terminated probationary employees in pay status and provide each with back pay from the date of termination,” and to develop a phased plan for return-to-duty for terminated employees.⁵ Since USDA’s statement on March 11 complying with the MSPB’s order, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California further issued a preliminary injunction on March 13 and ordered the immediate reinstatement of employees at USDA, among other departments.

As USDA works to reinstate terminated employees, we strongly urge USDA to address vulnerabilities in our animal and plant inspection programs at APHIS by expediting the return of agricultural inspectors to their duty stations. Additionally, we urge you to ensure robust standards and staffing for agricultural inspections as USDA continues with its stated objective to pursue “an aggressive plan to optimize its workforce.” To that end, we respectfully request your response to the following questions in writing by no later than April 11, 2025:

1. How many APHIS employees, both probationary and non-probationary, were terminated on or after February 14, 2025? Please provide a breakdown by region and duty station.
2. What is the status of USDA’s efforts to reinstate all terminated probationary APHIS employees in pay status and provide each with back pay, as indicated in USDA’s press release of March 11, 2025?
3. What measures will you implement to ensure USDA will maintain sufficient and robust agricultural inspection operations as part of any future Reduction in Force plans?

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to working with you to reinstate APHIS agricultural inspectors and protect American agriculture across the nation.

Sincerely,



Jim Tokuda
Member of Congress



Andre Carson
Member of Congress

⁵ “USDA Status Update on Probationary Employees,” Press Release, U.S. Department of Agriculture, March 11, 2025, <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/03/11/usda-status-update-probationary-employees>.



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress




Ed Case
Member of Congress



Josh Riley
Member of Congress




Eugene Simon Vindman
Member of Congress



Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress



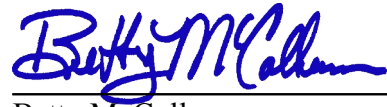
Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



LaMonica McIver
Member of Congress



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



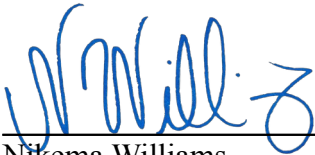
Shri Thanedar
Member of Congress



Derek T. Tran
Member of Congress



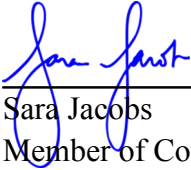
Sarah McBride
Member of Congress



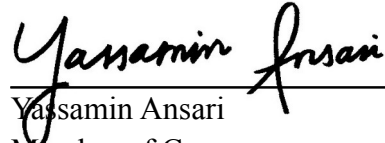
Nikema Williams
Member of Congress



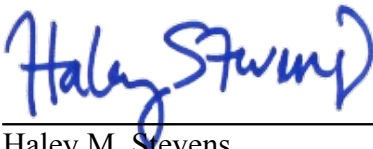
Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



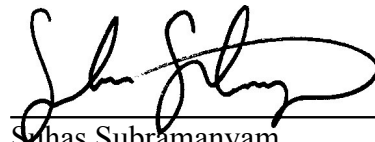
Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress



Yassamin Ansari
Member of Congress



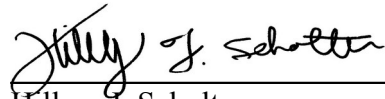
Haley M. Stevens
Member of Congress



Suhas Subramanyam
Member of Congress



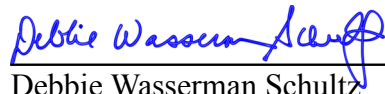
Kelly Morrison
Member of Congress



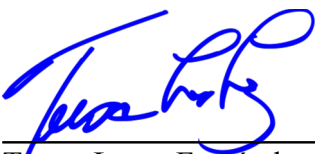
Hillary J. Scholten
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



Teresa Leger Fernández
Member of Congress



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



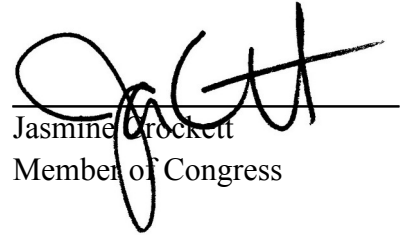
Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



Patrick Ryan
Member of Congress



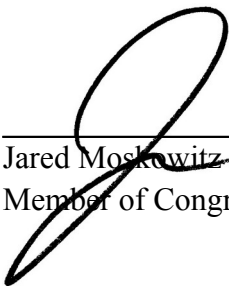
Jasmine Crockett
Member of Congress



Troy Carter
Member of Congress



Sydney Kamlager-Dove
Member of Congress



Jared Moskowitz
Member of Congress

CC: Dr. Michael Watson, Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service