

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

August 27, 2018

Dear Secretary Perdue:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to express extreme concern with your announced reorganization of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (ERS). ERS plays a crucial role in the development of evidence-based policy at USDA through independent statistical analysis on a broad range of issues, including food security and nutrition assistance programs. Your proposals to realign ERS under the Office of the Secretary and to relocate ERS outside of the National Capital Region threaten ERS's position as an independent agency, diminish ERS's capacity, and undermine the value and gravitas of ERS's statistical analyses.

ERS's analysis of food security and nutrition assistance programs serves as the foundation for a comprehensive body of research by public and nonprofit entities. ERS's efforts to analyze food consumption trends inform USDA's policy decisions with respect to nutrition labeling and dietary patterns. This analysis is imperative as USDA currently considers revisions to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and, for the first time, articulates dietary guidelines for pregnant women and children under the age of two. Likewise, ERS provides analysis of nutrition assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). These reports guide USDA's efforts to streamline processes and ensure efficiency in federal programs.

These disruptive proposals threaten to upend ERS's operations, strip ERS of its independence as a statistical agency, undermine staff morale, and instigate unnecessary and counterproductive staff turnover. We encourage you to ensure that ERS continues to serve its crucial role in the analysis of food security and nutrition assistance programs. In our view, this can only be accomplished through preserving ERS's independence as an agency, retaining ERS in the National Capital Region, and sustaining ERS's current funding and staffing levels.

The undersigned organizations urge you to rescind these damaging proposals before you lose an invaluable team of dedicated professionals who care deeply about food security and the nation's nutrition assistance programs and who have served consecutive Secretaries in helping USDA set and monitor sound nutrition policies.

Sincerely,

1,000 Days
Advocates for Better Children's Diets

American Heart Association
American Public Health Association
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Child Care Aware® of America
First Focus Campaign for Children
Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy, Teachers College Columbia University
National WIC Association
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior
ZERO TO THREE

cc:

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Senate Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Senate Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable John Hoeven
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
House Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Nita Lowey
House Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate

The Honorable David Perdue
Senate Agriculture Subcommittee on
Nutrition, Agricultural Research, and
Specialty Crops
United States Senate

The Honorable Bob Casey
Senate Agriculture Subcommittee on
Nutrition, Agricultural Research, and
Specialty Crops
United States Senate