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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

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<http://help.senate.gov>

June 7, 2019

The Honorable Alexander Acosta
Secretary of Labor
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Acosta:

I write to urge the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL or the Department) to reverse its decision to terminate the Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers (CCC) program and permanently close nine centers. Ending the CCC program will harm the more than 3,000 students and 1,000 employees currently at CCCs, limit opportunities for at-risk young people in rural America to gain meaningful job training, and impact our nation's ability to respond to natural disasters.¹ The process to terminate the CCC program is deeply troubling and I request that you expeditiously provide the relevant information and data you used as the basis for this decision.

Job Corps CCCs provide invaluable job training and economic opportunities to underserved youth in rural areas, and help the U.S. Forest Service fulfill its mission to conserve, develop, and manage public natural resources and public recreation areas, and respond to natural disasters like wildfires and hurricanes. On May 24, 2019, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) notified DOL of its intent to end its role in the CCC program.² Later that day, DOL announced it had accepted USDA's proposal and planned to permanently close nine CCCs and replace the remaining fifteen centers with private contract operators or partnerships—including three centers in Washington state.³ It is not clear why the Fort Simcoe CCC was selected for permanent closure, what is planned for the Columbia Basin or Curlew CCCs, or what will happen to the nearly 450 students currently enrolled at those three Washington state centers.

On May 30, DOL published in the Federal Register its proposal to “deactivate” nine centers “as part of the CCC phase-out activities.”⁴ The Federal Register Notice referenced the three criteria DOL previously relied on to determine whether to close Job Corps centers, but announced the Department was creating a new criterion to justify closing the nine CCCs—“program reform and streamlining”—which raises questions about DOL's rationale for closing the nine centers and ending the CCC program.

There continues to be little information about how the troubling decision to terminate the CCC program came about, as well as how USDA and DOL plan to draw down the program. At congressional staff briefings conducted by DOL and USDA staff overseeing the Job Corps and

¹ <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/eta/eta20190524>

² <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/f/?id=0000016a-eafc-df31-a1ee-effec2d0001>

³ <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/eta/eta20190524>

⁴ <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2019-05-30/pdf/2019-11262.pdf>

CCC programs respectively, the agencies provided few answers about the reasons for ending the CCC program, plans for closing or transitioning operations at the 25 centers, and what will happen to the thousands of affected students and staff. On June 4, USDA abruptly canceled a briefing of congressional staff, explaining the agency had just learned from news reports that President Trump had overruled DOL's decision to close the Anaconda CCC in Montana. On June 5, in a joint DOL and USDA bicameral and bipartisan briefing for the Appropriations Committee, both agencies again failed to provide data to support ending the program and closing centers. The continued failure to provide any data supporting the decision to end the CCC program and deactivate nine centers—combined with the abrupt, uncoordinated, unexplained reversal of the decision to close the Anaconda CCC—conveys a haphazard approach to such a momentous decision and calls into question whether the Department is capable of addressing the disruptions to program staff and students and the communities they serve.

I am extremely distressed by the lack of transparency, accountability, and rigorous analysis behind a decision that will impact thousands of individuals who rely on the historic CCC program for their livelihoods and future economic success. To that end, please provide responses to the following questions and requests no later than June 21, 2019:

1. When and how were decisions made regarding (a) the transition of operations of all CCCs from USDA to DOL, and (b) the proposed change in operation of each of the 25 CCCs? What entities and individuals did the Department consult?
2. In the May 30 Federal Register Notice, DOL claimed the proposed closures and transition of operations “would advance broad program reform and streamlining of operations, while also serving more students.” Please provide a detailed analysis supporting this claim, including all data the Department developed and relied upon in determining which CCC sites to close, convert to private operation, or convert to demonstration programs.
3. Why did the Department elect to create a new criterion to justify the closures, rather than relying on the existing three criteria for closing Job Corps centers?
4. How and when were the Forest Service and affected workers and students notified of the decision to close and change the operation of the CCCs? How does DOL plan to support and transition students throughout the process? How many CCC workers, including contractors, will be affected, and what is DOL's plan to assist affected workers?
5. Please provide a detailed table of all actual, anticipated, or estimated grant awards, contracts, agreements, commitments and other expenses by any discretionary appropriation account, including the Employment and Training Administration-Program Administration or any other Departmental Management accounts, used in any manner to support (a) the transition of operations of all CCCs from USDA to DOL, and (b) the proposed change in operation of each of the 25 CCCs.
6. What communications were made between DOL and the General Services Administration (GSA) regarding the disposition of each of the 25 CCC facilities?
7. Please provide any proposed, finalized, and future modifications to the Interagency Agreement between DOL and USDA that has governed the CCC program since 2008.
8. Despite being initially slated for closure, the Anaconda CCC will now remain operational in Montana. What data and analysis were relied on in reversing the decision to close the Anaconda CCC? Was DOL involved in the decision? Does DOL anticipate any changes in the proposed closures of the other eight centers?

9. What other changes does DOL plan to make to the Job Corps program?

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, or would like to further discuss compliance with this request, please contact Kathleen Borschow with my HELP Committee Staff at (202) 224-0767.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

cc: The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Lamar Alexander
United States Senator
Chairman, Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions