

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

June 4, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins,

We write in strong opposition to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) plan to close the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) research and development center in Hamden, Connecticut. This site has been on the forefront of fighting invasive insects and diseases that threaten our forests for decades, and we urge you to abandon this short-sighted reorganization plan and leave the Connecticut lab intact.

The Hamden R&D lab does critically important work studying and combatting invasive insects in the Northeast. Over the years, researchers there have tackled a number of critical problem species, including the Spongy moth, Asian longhorned beetle, and Spotted Lanternflies.¹ It is hard to overstate the threat these species pose to forests in our region – one recent study found that invasive insects are now responsible for a quarter of tree deaths across the Northeast.² At a time when our New England trees are under such grave threat, it defies logic that this administration would seek to close a research facility that has a proven track record of successfully responding to invasive species. It is especially baffling considering your own stated goals for USDA research and development. In a Secretary's memo dated December 30, 2025, you list "protecting the integrity of American agriculture from invasive species" as one of your research and development priorities.³ Now just a few months later, you are threatening to close a facility that does exactly that.

The closure of the Hamden lab comes as part of a broader restructuring plan, where USDA aims to close 57 of 77 similar facilities across the country and consolidate them into a

¹ Áine Pennello, "US Forest Service considers closing 2 invasive insect labs in CT as part of national reorganization," *Connecticut Public*, May 21, 2026, <https://www.ctpublic.org/news/2026-05-21/us-forest-service-considers-closing-2-invasive-insect-labs-in-ct-as-part-of-national-reorganization>.

² Abagael Giles, "Invasive insects, disease now kill more trees in the Northeast than logging, study finds" *Vermont Public*, April 10, 2026, <https://www.wbur.org/news/2026/04/10/insects-disease-trees-northeast-vermont-study>.

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Secretary Rollins Announces New Priorities for Research and Development in 2026," press release, December 30, 2025, <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/12/30/secretary-rollins-announces-new-priorities-research-and-development-2026>.

handful of regional facilities, with the work of the Connecticut facility expected to move to Warren, Pennsylvania.⁴ The agency has claimed that this move will not impact the quality of the invasive species work performed by USFS, but as experts have pointed out, location matters when performing this type of research.⁵ The ability to respond quickly to emerging threats would be severely diminished by moving further away. And that is to say nothing of the personal impacts on the dedicated workers at the lab. While the agency has claimed that no scientific positions will be eliminated, that leaves the possibility that these employees will be asked to relocate to the new regional facility in Warren, Pennsylvania.⁶ Further, the agency's insistence that nothing is finalized yet with this proposal has left these employees in limbo for months now, wondering if they will still have a job or will have to upend their lives and move hundreds of miles and several states away.

The USFS research and development center in Hamden, Connecticut has done vital work to protect our nation from invasive species for decades. We urge you to let this critical work continue and immediately abandon your consolidation plan to close this facility.

Sincerely,



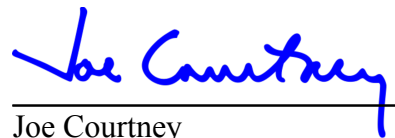
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

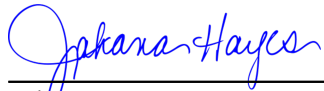


Joe Courtney
Member of Congress

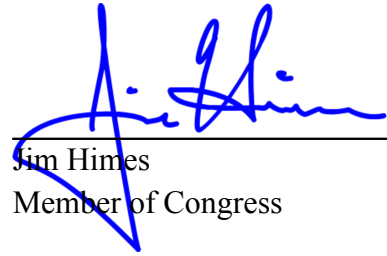
⁴ "Forest Service Reorganization," U.S. Department of Agriculture, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/reorganization>.

⁵ "Forest Service Reorganization."; Pennello, "US Forest Service considers closing 2 invasive insect labs."

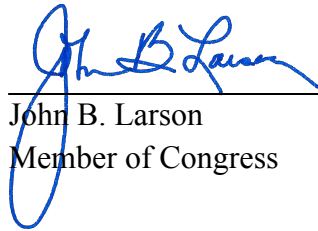
⁶ "Forest Service Reorganization."



Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress
Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Nutrition
and Foreign Agriculture



Jim Himes
Member of Congress



John B. Larson
Member of Congress

CC: Chief Tom Schultz, U.S. Forest Service
Associate Chief Christopher French, U.S. Forest Service