



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

Affiliated with the International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers, AFL-CIO

July 12, 2016

The Honorable Tom Tidwell
Chief, U.S. Forest Service
Yates Building, 5th Floor, NW Wing
201 Fourteenth Street, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Tidwell,

Last week, the U.S. Forest Service announced its final decision to close the Ouachita Civilian Conservation Center in Royal, Ark. This closure comes on the heels of the closure of Treasure Lake and four consecutive years of failed Agency leadership and an inability of senior officials from the USFS and the National Office of the Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers (CCCs) to make the changes necessary to improve the performance of these CCCs. We find the lack of action by the Agency to improve the performance of these centers unacceptable. Even more troubling, we believe that Department of Labor (DOL) will list several more of our Centers for closure shortly.

The blame for the recent closure of Treasure Lake and Ouachita Civilian Conservations Centers, as well as the chronic poor performance of other Centers, falls squarely on the shoulders of the inept leadership at the CCC National Office. The current CCC administration has refused to work with struggling Centers to develop and implement effective Performance Improvement Plans. When NFFE offered to work with the agency to improve the performance of struggling centers, we were denied participation in center assessment teams. This denial came in spite of a strong record of labor-management partnerships between NFFE and the USFS that have rehabilitated previously-struggling centers. It has become increasingly clear that the CCC National Office does not have the leadership nor experience necessary to make needed strategic decisions and changes to enhance our CCC program.

Without immediate intervention by the Agency, we fear for the longevity of all our Centers, not just those currently underperforming. We ask that you intervene immediately to make the necessary changes at the CCC National Office to stymie any more losses to our historic CCC program. The lack of seasoned and experienced program leadership at the National Office-level has been devastating to the program.

In addition to poor performance, there are a number of pressing problems that have to be addressed. One of the most significant issues facing the majority of our Centers is alarming staffing shortages. These shortages are making it impossible for affected Centers to maintain basic and essential operations, and needlessly jeopardizes their performance and safety. When Centers are short-staffed, there is less oversight of daily Center activities, raising safety concerns for both staff and students.

Another significant problem is the high number of empty beds (On Board Strength) at numerous Centers. We cannot maintain half-full Centers and not expect to be a target for cuts from DOL and Congress. The Agency must immediately engage DOL to ensure that our Centers are running at full capacity.

NFFE will not stand idly by and let the lack of leadership and experience run this historic program into the ground. We stand ready to work with the Agency to tackle these significant challenges facing our program. NFFE brings direct knowledge and experience from the field with real-time feedback to the table. With two Centers closed and a number of others in serious jeopardy, we are requesting to meet with you and your leadership team to discussion how to protect and improve the program for our dedicated Forest Service employees and the student population we have served for decades.

With the new program year starting July 1, it is imperative that we meet with you and your leadership team in the near future to discuss the future of our Centers. We want to ensure that our Centers are safe, cost-efficient and are performing in a manner that protects the program from any additional cuts—but it is going to take a collaborative effort to make that happen. We look forward to hearing from you and stand ready to assist in making the changes needed.

Thank you, and I look forward to your response,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William R. Dougan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "D" at the end.

William R. Dougan
National President
National Federation of Federal Employees, IAMAW, AFL-CIO