

# U.S. House of Representatives

## Committee on Natural Resources

Washington, DC 20515

November 14, 2019

The Honorable David Bernhardt  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

I am writing to again express my serious concerns regarding the U.S. Department of the Interior's (DOI) plans to move Bureau of Land Management (BLM) staff from Washington, D.C. to locations across the western United States.

As you know, the House Committee on Natural Resources held an oversight hearing to better understand these planned moves in early September.<sup>1</sup> We appreciate DOI's willingness to send a senior staff member, BLM Acting Director William Perry Pendley, to testify at that hearing; unfortunately, DOI's testimony and the Acting Director's responses left us with more questions than answers. At that hearing, Acting Director Pendley's official testimony described a detailed analysis of each position assessing its optimal location, stating that "The redeployment of the BLM's headquarters functions to Western locations is beneficial for the BLM's employees, the constituents they serve, and for every American taxpayer."<sup>2</sup> At that very same hearing, Acting Director Pendley admitted that BLM had not consulted with BLM employees as to whether they might leave the agency as a result of these planned moves. The Acting Director also said he would have to consult with staff from the DOI Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs to determine if he was allowed to share the analysis DOI had done to justify these relocations – analysis which DOI has still failed to provide more than two months later.

It is a significant concern that the Acting Director of BLM was unclear about whether he could share documentation justifying a major reorganization of BLM with the Congressional Committee with oversight responsibility for BLM. That concern only deepened when the Acting Director

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources. (2019, September 10). *BLM Disorganization: Examining the Proposed Reorganization and Relocation of the Bureau of Land Management Headquarters to Grand Junction, Colorado*. Hearings before the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources, 116<sup>th</sup> Cong. (2019). Retrieved from <https://naturalresources.house.gov/hearings/-blm-disorganization-examining-the-proposed-reorganization-and-relocation-of-the-bureau-of-land-management-headquarters-to-grand-junction-colorado>

<sup>2</sup> *BLM Disorganization: Examining the Proposed Reorganization and Relocation of the Bureau of Land Management Headquarters to Grand Junction, Colorado*. Hearings before the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources, 116<sup>th</sup> Cong. (2019) (testimony of William Perry Pendley). Retrieved from <https://naturalresources.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Testimony%20-%20William%20Perry%20Pendley%2009.10.19.pdf>

came out in the media suggesting that the small amount of information shared with Congress on these moves may in fact be incorrect, that the agency is internally contemplating moves not detailed in these shared plans, and that, apparently, DOI's relocation plans are still in flux.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these recent statements about plans for the relocation of BLM still being subject to change, DOI felt comfortable issuing hundreds of relocation notices to BLM staff yesterday, requiring them to accept their relocations in 30 days or face termination.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, DOI has failed on numerous occasions to respond to verbal and written requests for documents, instead sending already public or unrelated information.<sup>5</sup>

It is unacceptable that DOI would begin relocating agency staff before sharing basic information with Congress justifying these moves. While DOI does have funding to complete at least part of these relocations, it does not have unlimited authority to restructure agencies in a manner that former BLM staff have suggested risk destroying the BLM entirely.<sup>6</sup> Until the agency can positively demonstrate that there was adequate analysis to justify the highlighted benefits of this reorganization, it should not go forward. If DOI continues to proceed with these moves without first providing this information, our Committee may be required to take additional steps under our purview to acquire the requested documents and information. The staff of the BLM, the constituencies who rely on the agency, and the American people who own our public lands and resources deserve clarity on these proposed moves.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva  
Chair

House Committee on Natural Resources

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<sup>3</sup> Webb, D. (2019, November 8). More BLM jobs could be headed to Grand Junction. *The Daily Sentinel*. Retrieved from [https://www.gjsentinel.com/news/western\\_colorado/more-blm-jobs-could-be-headed-to-grand-junction/article\\_ccdb1ac4-01ef-11ea-8c10-20677ce05640.html?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=email&utm\\_campaign=user-share](https://www.gjsentinel.com/news/western_colorado/more-blm-jobs-could-be-headed-to-grand-junction/article_ccdb1ac4-01ef-11ea-8c10-20677ce05640.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=email&utm_campaign=user-share)

<sup>4</sup> Katz, E. (2019, November 12). Interior Department Delivers Hundreds of Relocation Notices to Employees. *Government Executive*. Retrieved from <https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2019/11/interior-department-delivers-hundreds-relocation-notices-employees/161246/>

<sup>5</sup> Committee Staff asked for this information at a briefing with DOI staff on July 18, 2019; Members of the Committee sent letters requesting documents and information on July 23, 2019 and September 25, 2019; Members of the Committee asked for this information at a Committee hearing on September 10, 2019 and followed up in questions for the record on September 16, 2019. Despite these continued requests, we have received virtually none of the requested information from DOI.

<sup>6</sup> Shepard, E. (2019, July 22). Letter from the Public Lands Foundation to Chairman Lisa Murkowski and Ranking Member Joe Manchin in strong opposition to the proposed reorganization of the Bureau of Land Management. Retrieved from <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II00/20190910/109893/HHRG-116-II00-20190910-SD5442.pdf>