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April 8, 2025

Dear Senators Schumer, Thune, Klobuchar, and Boozman

We write as members of the Congressional Black Caucus serving on the House Agriculture Committee to express our deep concerns regarding the nomination of Stephen Vaden to the position of Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. Mr. Vaden's tenure as general counsel at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) during the first Trump Administration raises serious questions about his fitness for this role.

The Deputy Secretary of Agriculture plays a critical role in shaping and implementing policies that directly impact Black farmers and producers, rural communities, and food security initiatives that affect underserved populations. Given these responsibilities, it is imperative that any nominee demonstrate a strong commitment to equity and fairness to all of the people served by the USDA. Mr. Vaden's record, however, reflects a pattern of undermining civil rights protections, disregarding equity in agricultural programs, and failing to uphold the fair treatment of Black farmers, producers, and ranchers.

During Mr. Vaden's tenure as USDA General Counsel during the first Trump Administration, he oversaw numerous efforts to roll back protections for Black farmers who faced systemic discrimination in accessing USDA programs.¹ Under his leadership, the Office of Civil Rights was significantly weakened, resulting in delayed and dismissed discrimination claims from Black and other minority farmers. Additionally, his legal approach consistently prioritized the agency's interests over historically disadvantaged farming communities, reinforcing barriers to equitable access to USDA programs and resources.²

Furthermore, Mr. Vaden facilitated harmful changes to federal nutrition policy, including not only more stringent work requirements,³ but also altering eligibility criteria.⁴

¹<https://www.npr.org/2023/02/19/1156851675/in-2022-black-farmers-were-persistently-left-behind-from-the-usdas-loan-system>

²<https://www.congress.gov/event/117th-congress/house-event/114408/text>

³<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/12/04/trump-administration-tightens-work-requirements-snap-which-could-cut-hundreds-thousands-food-stamps/>

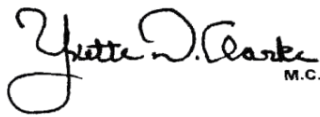
⁴<https://www.cato.org/briefing-paper/snap-high-costs-low-nutrition>

These moves would have kicked thousands of people off the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). With 21 percent of Black households experiencing food insecurity,⁵ these policy changes to SNAP would have disproportionately impacted Black communities.

Mr. Vaden's actions are in direct conflict with efforts to rectify longstanding disparities within federal agricultural and nutrition policy. Given these pressing concerns, we urge you to consider these factors as you consider Mr. Vaden's nomination.

We stand ready to engage in further dialogue and to work collaboratively to ensure that the leadership at the USDA is not only qualified but also committed to fostering a more fair and just agricultural system for all Americans.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to working together to uphold the values of fairness and justice in federal agricultural policy.

Handwritten signature of Yvette D. Clarke in black ink, with "M.C." written in small letters below the signature.

U.S. Representative Yvette D. Clarke (NY-09)
Chair, Congressional Black Caucus

Handwritten signature of Shontel Brown in blue ink.

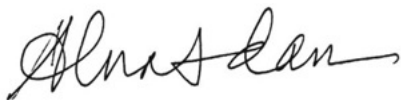
U.S. Representative Shontel Brown (OH-11)
Vice Ranking Member, House Committee on Agriculture

Handwritten signature of David Scott in blue ink.

U.S. Representative David Scott (GA-13)

Handwritten signature of Shomari Figures in blue ink.

U.S. Representative Shomari Figures (AL-02)

Handwritten signature of Alma Adams in blue ink.

U.S. Representative Alma Adams (NC-12)

Handwritten signature of Jahana Hayes in blue ink.

U.S. Representative Jahana Hayes (CT-05)

⁵ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/chart-detail?chartId=108925>

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jonathan L. Jackson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'J' and 'A'.

U.S. Representative Jonathan Jackson (IL-01)