

SENT VIA US MAIL (CERTIFIED, RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED) AND EMAIL

May 5, 2014

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
212A Whitten Building
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250
Email: tom.vilsack@osec.usda.gov and secretary.vilsack@osec.usda.gov

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

The signatories of this letter are former leaders and employees of the USDA Forest Service Law Enforcement and Investigations (LE&I) program. We are reluctantly reaching out to you now as we feel this program is in a state of crisis because of the incompetence of its current Director, David L. Ferrell. We urge you to take the needed steps to reassign Director Ferrell from his position as soon as possible.

To provide detail for your understanding, we've attached two documents we ask you to read. They include results of a recently completed outside survey of all current LE&I employees, and a summary we have prepared of what we believe are Director Ferrell's substantial deficits in meeting the required Executive Core Qualifications (ECQ's) critical for successful performance in the Senior Executive Service.

Throughout his tenure as first Deputy Director and currently Director of LE&I, Mr. Ferrell has established a program-wide culture of negative leadership. This culture has created chaos, fear, stress, defeat, anger, isolation, retaliation, learned helplessness, and anxiety throughout the organization's employees. He is an extreme micro-manager, trying to control even trivial matters at all levels of the organization – often punishing managers who do not include him in decisions they would normally make on their own based upon their professional judgment. He doesn't manage or resolve conflict constructively; instead, he seems to thrive on finding “mistakes” and implementing brutal adverse actions for oftentimes what one might see as minor reasons. He also, at times, pits employees against each other, fracturing team and unit trust; creating a climate of “every man for himself.” Anger and retaliation regularly greet any employee who disagrees with him or tries to reject his adverse influence, even senior Assistant Directors and Special Agents in Charge. He alone was a significant reason many of the undersigned transferred or retired when we did.

Comments from the LE&I survey indicate that a majority of current employees also feel this way, and 4 out of 5 rate him as an ineffective leader. The survey comments also indicate that Director Ferrell continues to be unable to lead strategically and to establish a clear vision and priorities at all levels of the organization. These things, along with his weak technical background in law enforcement and budgeting, and extreme risk aversion, have combined to drag this program to a crawl. Though we are concerned about other managers in the organization as well, it's hard to tell how they might perform absent Director Ferrell's presence and extreme oversight, as we know from experience that they must comply with his dictatorial demands or face consequences. We believe that a number of the issues identified in both the PEER Survey and Director Ferrell's ECQ Analysis also point to LE&I's shortcomings in redeeming its responsibilities for fair and equal treatment of employees. Accordingly, we are also submitting copies of this correspondence to the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights for corrective action.

We hope you share our concern about the delivery of a USDA program that is so critical to employee and public health and safety, citizens' rights, and resource protection. This is not a simple case of a few disgruntled employees. We are aware that just recently, Forest Service Chief Tidwell hosted a conference call with the LE&I workforce. Apparently Chief Tidwell was startled and surprised by the input – largely adverse comments about Director Ferrell and the damaging management climate he has maintained. We appreciate this last minute effort by the Chief, however we believe this intervention is “too little, too late”. This current input, combined with ours attached dating back over a decade, also demonstrate Director Ferrell's unwillingness or inability to change. The agency is clearly in denial and has repeatedly refused to acknowledge the reality of an entire workforce with a broken spirit.

Mr. Secretary, we dedicated many years of our lives to this program that we care for deeply, and we simply cannot stand by any longer and watch it slowly destroyed. Please act now to establish new leadership to begin its recovery. We eagerly look forward to receiving your reply in this matter. You may address return correspondence to: The Thin Green Line, 6733 Lawyers Rd, Spotsylvania, VA 22551.

Respectfully submitted (52 signatures follow, in alphabetical order by first name):

/s/ ANN MELLE, ret. (20 years in LE&I)

Assistant Director, Homeland Security, Washington Office (2 Years)

Assistant Director, Enforcement and Liaison, Washington Office (7 years)

Senior Special Agent, Enforcement and Liaison, Washington Office (3 years)

/s/ BARRY MAIJALA, ret. (21 years in LE&I)
Patrol Captain, Chugach NF, Alaska Region (7 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, Lincoln NF, Southwest Region (5 years)

/s/ BILL McCONNELL, ret. (30 years in LE&I)
Special Agent, Colville/Okanogan NF's, Pacific Northwest Region (21 years)
Special Agent, Nicolet NF, Eastern Region (5 years)

/s/ BOB OLIN, ret. (20 years in LE&I)
Law Enforcement Officer (Mounted Enforcement), Inyo NF, Pacific Southwest Region (20 years)

/s/ BOB SHUKER, ret. (23 years in LE&I)
Special Agent, San Bernardino NF, Pacific Southwest Region (10 years)
Special Agent (regional Training Coordinator) Pacific Southwest Region (6 years)
Patrol Commander, North Zone, Pacific Southwest Region (2 years)

/s/ CHARLES "Hoot" MURRAY, ret. (27 years in LE&I)
Patrol Captain, AZ/NM South Zone, Southwest Region (6 years)
Patrol Captain, Lincoln-Gila/Apache NF's, Southwest Region (5 years)

/s/ M. H. CHIP ELKINS, ret. (20 years in LE&I)
Law Enforcement Officer (Security Manager), Eastern Region (20 years)

/s/ CHUCK SHAMBLIN, ret. (21 years in LE&I)
Patrol Captain, Angeles and Cleveland NF's, Pacific Southwest Region (21 years)

/s/ CRAIG J. OSBORNE, ret. (31 years with National Forest System)
Reserve Law Enforcement Officer, Chequamegon-Nicolet NF, Northern Region (13 years)

/s/ DALE P. McCORMICK, ret. (24 years in LE&I)
Special Agent in Charge, Rocky Mountain Region (4 years)
Special Agent in Charge, Southwest and Rocky Mountain Regions (2 years)
Special Agent in Charge, Alaska Region (2 years)

/s/ DAVID MONTALBANO, ret. (15 years in LE&I, 17 years in NPS)
Special Agent in Charge, National Technical Investigations Unit, Washington Office (10 years)
Assistant Special Agent in Charge, Southern Region (3 years)
Special Agent, Kisatchie NF (2 years)

/s/ J. DENNIS CULLEN, ret. (30 years in LE&I)
Patrol Captain, Central Zone, Pacific Southwest Region (12 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, Shasta-Trinity NF, Pacific Southwest Region (15 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, Los Padres NF, Pacific Southwest Region (3 years)

/s/ DONALD W. SIMON (9 years in LE&I, 12 years in BLM)
Lands and Realty Specialist, NF's in North Carolina (current position)
Law Enforcement Officer, Monongahela NF, Eastern Region (9 years, transferred from LE&I after obtaining 20 covered years of service)
Law Enforcement Ranger, CDD El Centro Resource Area, BLM (12 years)

/s/ DOUGLAS G. RYAN, ret. (31 years in LE&I)
Special Agent, Ozark-St. Francis NF's, Southern Region, (20 years)
Regional Technical Equipment Specialist (13 years as a collateral duty)
Law Enforcement Officer, NF's in Florida (11 years)

/s/ EDDIE E. GRAVES, ret. (28 years in LE&I)
Patrol Captain, Cherokee NF, Southern Region (8 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, NF's in South Carolina and Alabama, Southern Region (20 years)

/s/ GARY BARNETT, ret. (26 years in LE&I)
Patrol Captain, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, Pacific Southwest Region (11 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, Tahoe NF, Pacific Southwest Region (15 years)

/s/ GEORGE D. HEDGES, ret. (32 years in LE&I)
Law Enforcement Officer, NF's in Alabama, Southern Region (32 years)

/s/ GLEN THOMAS, ret. (29 years in LE&I)
Supervisory Special Agent, Appalachian HIDTA, Southern Region (4 years)
Special Agent, Daniel Boone NF, Southern Region (4 years)
Special Agent, Ozark-St. Francis NF and George Washington/Jefferson NF's, Southern Region (12 years)

/s/ GORDON GREGG, ret. (20 years in LE&I)
Assistant Director, Training, Development and Standards, Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, (6 years)
Special Agent in Charge, Alaska Region (2 years)

/s/ HARRY D. SHILES III, ret. (27 years in LE&I)
Patrol Captain, Colorado Southwest Zone, Rocky Mountain Region (7 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, Colorado Southwest Zone, Rocky Mountain Region (20 years)

/s/ M. HARPER CORDER, ret. (31 years in LE&I)
Special Agent, Daniel Boone NF and Monongahela NF, Southern and Eastern Regions (15 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, Daniel Boone NF and George Washington/Jefferson NF's, Southern Region (16 years)

/s/ HEATHER CAMPBELL, ret. (21 years in LE&I)
Special Agent, Los Padres NF, Pacific Southwest Region (5 years, exercised a Disability Retirement from LE&I due to an on-the-job injury)
Law Enforcement Officer, Tahoe, Cleveland, and Eldorado NF's Pacific Southwest Region (16 years)

/s/ JEFFREY E. BROWN, ret. (26 years in LE&I)
Patrol Captain, Klamath/Modoc/Six Rivers/Shasta Trinity NF's, Pacific Southwest Region (6 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, Klamath NF, Pacific Southwest Region (9 years)

/s/ JEROME J. CIMINO, ret. (21 years in LE&I)
Patrol Captain, Inyo NF, Pacific Southwest Region (10 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, Inyo NF (11 years)

/s/ JIM PEARSON, ret. (19 years in LE&I)
Special Agent, Alaska Region (6 years)
Special Agent, Sequoia NF, Pacific Southwest Region (5 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, Sequoia NF, Pacific Southwest Region (8 years)

/s/ JIMMY D. HICKS, ret. (26 years in LE&I)
Patrol Captain, Ouachita NF. Southern Region (11 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, Ouachita NF, Southern Region (15 years)

/s/ JOHN A. "Andy" SADLER, ret. (27 years in LE&I)
Patrol Captain, Francis Marion and Sumter NF's, Southern Region (15 years)
Special Agent, Francis Marion and Sumter NF's, Southern Region (7 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, Daniel Boone NF, Southern Region (2 years)
Special Agent, USDA Office of Inspector General, Western Region (2 years)

/s/ JOHN DIEFENBACH, ret. (10 years in LE&I, 14 years in NPS)
Law Enforcement Officer, NF's in North Carolina, Southern Region (5 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, Land Between the Lakes NRA, Southern Region (5 years)
North District Ranger (Law Enforcement), Canaveral National Seashore, NPS (6 years)
Marijuana Eradication Coordinator for TN& KY, NPS (8 years)

/s/ JOHN L. (Jack) GREGORY, ret. (30 years in LE&I)
Special Agent in Charge, Southern Region (10 years)
Assistant Director, Training and Congressional Liaison, Washington Office (5 years)
Assistant Special Agent in Charge, Southern Region (8 years)
Special Agent, Willamette NF, Pacific Northwest Region (5 years)

/s/ JOHN K. MAURER, ret. (22 years in LE&I)
Law Enforcement Officer, NF's in Alabama, Southern Region (22 years)

JON B. SHUMATE, ret. (23 years in LE&I)
Patrol Captain, Kaibab, Prescott, and Tonto NF's, Southwest Region (10 years)

/s/ J.W. ALLENDORF, ret. (11 years in LE&I)
Patrol Commander, Northern Region (3 years)
Patrol Captain, East Zone, Northern Region (3 years)
Patrol Captain, Six Rivers NF, Pacific Southwest Region (5 years)

/s/ KEN RICE, (18 years in LE&I)
Forest Safety Officer, Umpqua NF, Pacific Northwest Region (current position)
Patrol Captain, Caribou-Targhee, Salmon-Challis and Bridger-Teton NF's, Intermountain Region (10 years, transferred from LE&I due to an on-the-job injury)
Law Enforcement Officer, White River NF, Rocky Mountain Region (3 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, Umpqua NF, Pacific Northwest Region (5 years)

/s/ KENNETH A. HARP, ret. (28 years in LE&I)
Patrol Captain, San Bernardino & Inyo NF's, Pacific Southwest Region (10 years)
Patrol Captain, Angeles NF, Pacific Southwest Region (18 years)

/s/ MARK CHAN, ret. (23 years in LE&I)
Regional Patrol Commander, Pacific Southwest Region (3 years)
Regional Patrol Commander, Alaska Region (4 years)
Patrol Captain, Mt. Hood NF & Columbia River Gorge NSA, Pacific Northwest Region (7 years)

/s/ MARK SCHODOWSKI, ret. (20 years in LE&I)
Law Enforcement Officer, George Washington/Jefferson NF (20 years)
NFFE FS Council Law Enforcement Committee Chairman (7 years as a collateral duty)

/s/ MARK A. TARANTINO, ret. (25 years in LEI)
Senior Special Agent, National Counterdrug Program/Operation Alliance, Washington Office (6 years)
Supervisory Special Agent, SW Oregon Zone, Pacific Northwest Region, (7 years)

/s/ MIKE GAY, ret. (30 years in LE&I)
Patrol Commander, North Zone, Southern Region (10 years)
Patrol Captain, Daniel Boone NF, Southern Region (4 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, Daniel Boone NF, Southern Region (16 years)

/s/ MICHAEL WILLIAMS, (5 years in LE&I, 19 years in NPS)
Special Agent, Northeast US, NPS (current position)
Senior Special Agent, Investigations and Internal Affairs, Washington Office (2 years)
Special Agent, Alaska Region (3 years)
Various Law Enforcement Positions with the NPS (14 years)

/s/ MICHAEL A. ZUNINO, ret. (25 years in LE&I)
Patrol Captain, Lassen, Modoc, Shasta Trinity, and Plumas NF's, Pacific Southwest Region (8 years)

Law Enforcement Officer, Lassen NF, Pacific Southwest Region (17 years)

/s/ PAUL E. JERINIGAN, ret. (27 years in LE&I)

Patrol Captain, NF's in Florida and Kisatchie NF (14 years)

Law Enforcement Officer, NF's in Texas and Daniel Boone NF (13 years)

/s/ REX WOODSON, ret. (27 years in LE&I)

Supervisory Special Agent, West Zone, Southern Region (6 years)

Special Agent, Ouachita NF (13 years)

/s/ RICHARD L. GRANDALSKI, ret. (11 years in LE&I)

Assistant Director, Investigations and Internal Affairs, Washington Office (2 years)

Branch Chief Timber Theft Investigations, Washington Office (1 year)

Assistant Special Agent in Charge (Major Case Management Coordinator) (2 years)

Supervisory Special Agent, Angeles NF, Pacific Southwest Region (3 years)

Law Enforcement Officer, Sierra NF, Pacific Southwest Region (3 years)

/s/ ROBERT PETERS, (10 years in LE&I)

Assistant Fleet Manager, Nez Perce/Clearwater NF's, Northern Region (current position)

Law Enforcement Officer, Nez Perce/Clearwater NF's, Northern Region (10 years, transferred from LE&I after receiving an on-the-job injury)

/s/ ROBERTA A. PAGE, ret. (16 years in LE&I)

Law Enforcement Officer (K9 Handler), Southwest Zone, Eastern Region (16 years)

Federal Bureau of Prisons, DOJ (8 years)

/s/ STEPHEN J. MORGAN, ret. (7 years in LE&I)

Special Agent, Eldorado NF, Pacific Southwest Region (7 years)

/s/ TIMOTHY F. CLARK, ret. (30 years in LE&I)

Patrol Captain, Utah Zone, Intermountain Region (12 years)

Law Enforcement Officer, Ashley and Uinta NF's, Intermountain Region (18 years)

/s/ VICKIE SELL, ret. (24 years in LE&I)

Law Enforcement Officer, Chattahoochee- Oconee NF, Southern Region (7 years)

Law Enforcement Officer, Francis Marion and Sumter NF, Southern Region (7 years)

/s/ WILLIAM DALE GENTRY, ret. (16 years in LE&I)

Special Agent, NF's in Alabama and Cherokee NF, Southern Region (16 years)

Special Agent, Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (11 years)

/s/ WILLIAM G. GIBSON, ret. (30 years in LE&I)
Special Agent, Eastern Region (20 years)
Regional Technical Equipment Specialist (7 years as a collateral duty)
Law Enforcement Officer, Eastern Region (10 years)

/s/ WILLIAM JOHNSON, ret. (30 years in LE&I)
Special Agent, FS National Academy Instructor, Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (7 years)
Law Enforcement Officer, Various Positions, Pacific Southwest Region (23 years)

/s/ WOLFGANG D. TAMM, ret. (20 years in LE&I)
Patrol Captain, Angeles NF, Pacific Southwest Region (1 year)
Law Enforcement Officer (K9 Handler) (19 years)
Rangemaster/Firearms Instructor (15 years as a collateral duty)

cc: with Attachment 1, "Executive Core Qualification Failures of David L. Ferrell" and Attachment 2, "PEER LE&I Survey Results"

Krysta Harden
Deputy Secretary
212A Whitten Building
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250
Email: krysta.harden@osec.usda.gov and krysta.harden@usda.gov

Robert Bonnie
Undersecretary
Department of Natural Resources and the Environment
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250
Email: robert.bonnie@osec.usda.gov

Arthur "Butch" Blazer
Deputy Undersecretary
Department of Natural Resources and the Environment
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250
Email: arthur.blazer@osec.usda.gov

Dr. Joe Leonard
Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250, Mail Stop 0115
Email: joe.leonard@osec.usda.gov and ascr@usda.gov

Frederick W. Pfaeffle
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250, Mail Stop 0115
Email: frederick.pfaeffle@osec.usda.gov

Ashlee J. Davis
Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250, Mail Stop 0115
Email: ashlee.davis@osec.usda.gov

ATTACHMENTS FOLLOW