



Ms. Marianne Hladun
Regional Executive Vice-President
Public Service Alliance of Canada - Prairies
460 - 175 Hargrave Street
Winnipeg MB R3C 3R8

Dear Ms. Hladun:

We are writing on behalf of the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, further to our meeting of February 13, 2017, concerning the relocation of the Case Processing Centre (CPC) in Vegreville to Edmonton. It was a pleasure to meet you and Ms. Michelle Henderson, and to hear the number of issues you raised.

We would like to begin by reiterating that the decision to relocate the CPC in Vegreville to downtown Edmonton was a difficult one for the management of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). This relocation is not about job reduction, it is about sustaining and enabling the future growth of our operations in Alberta. All current IRCC indeterminate employees of CPC Vegreville will have the opportunity to continue employment in their current positions once the office is relocated to Edmonton. In addition, all of these employees will be offered relocation assistance to assist them with this transition. Term employees at the time of the relocation will also be offered employment at the new location in Edmonton.

IRCC recognizes that this relocation will have a significant impact on staff in Vegreville and on the community of Vegreville. The Department is making every effort to support staff by offering on-site counselling services in addition to detailed information sessions on relocation and workforce adjustment. IRCC management has endeavoured to be open and transparent with staff in Vegreville in order to provide them with detailed information allowing them to make informed decisions about their future.

In response to the specific issues you raised, we will address these in as much detail as possible below.

Issues with Recruitment: You have questioned the Department's statements regarding the challenges of recruiting new staff to work in CPC Vegreville. IRCC has reviewed the six external staffing processes completed for CPC Vegreville since 2013, which were open to the public across Canada and advertised on the Federal Public Service recruitment Website (www.jobs.gc.ca). These external processes were launched to fill various positions and levels (CR-03 to PM-04) and tenures (indeterminate, term, assignment, and casual). The staffing processes in Vegreville attracted far fewer applicants compared to the other CPCs located across Canada. Although these advertised processes have allowed existing CPC Vegreville employees to be regularized in indeterminate positions, they have only resulted in two new indeterminate employees joining CPC Vegreville since 2013.

With regard to student employment, management of CPC Vegreville continues to employ students and seeks to regularize their employment through a variety of mechanisms, when possible.

Number of Staff Eligible to Retire: You had concerns as to how many staff at CPC Vegreville were eligible to retire. We recognize that not all employees would exercise their option to retire as soon as they become eligible. However, it still stands that a large portion of the workforce in CPC Vegreville will be reaching retirement eligibility in the coming years. Specifically, 25 percent of the office's employees will be eligible for full retirement in the next five years. Given this fact, as well as the challenges faced with recruitment in CPC Vegreville, it is incumbent on departmental management to prepare itself accordingly.

Cost of Relocation to Edmonton: According to your analysis, the relocation of the office to Edmonton will be more expensive than remaining in Vegreville. However, the current office space in Vegreville has occupancy for 280 workstations and as you know we are unable to staff to that level, whereas the new CPC in Edmonton will accommodate 312 employees. Moreover, the introduction of shiftwork will allow IRCC to double this capacity, if required. Public Services and Procurement Canada's analysis of available options states that, over a 25-year life cycle, the overall cost to the Crown to relocate to Edmonton would be \$46M. This cost, however, would meet the Department's current and future business requirements thereby allowing us far greater flexibility to expand and diversify our operations. Although the option to remain in the current location in Vegreville comes at the lower cost of \$35.8M, this location would continue to constrain our operations, nor does it take into account potential additional costs – which could be significant – to bring the office space in Vegreville to the required standards or to increase the workspace capacity required for the CPC operations.

Efficiency: You raised concerns that the staff of CPC Vegreville have been unfairly labelled as an inefficient workforce that requires significant effort to manage, which influenced the decision to relocate the CPC to Edmonton. Please be assured that this is not the case. The staff at CPC Vegreville have met increasing demands and workloads, and we are pleased to note that 39 term employees were recently appointed on an

indeterminate basis. This is a testament to the high quality work that is currently being performed by staff in CPC Vegreville.

However, the nature of the work in IRCC is changing. As we centralize and repatriate more work to offices in Canada, IRCC requires a more diverse workforce that can respond to new and increasingly complex demands. As we process applications from an electronic global workload, we will need to recruit staff with a different skillset than previously required. This change is not unique to IRCC and is the same challenge faced in both private and public sectors.

IRCC will require persons with more advanced analytical skills and a broader appreciation of the complex decision-making required for this workload, as well as the flexibility to work in both English and French. With the increasing reliance on technology as we continue to modernize the work of IRCC, we require proximity to post secondary institutions that will support partnerships and recruitment efforts for the future. There is no doubt that the staff at CPC Vegreville have done great work. However, the relocation to Edmonton will allow IRCC to address its anticipated growth and future workload needs.

Impact of the relocation on Vegreville: You, and many people in the town of Vegreville, have voiced concerns regarding the overall social and economic impact of the relocation of the CPC on the town of Vegreville. We acknowledge that the relocation of the CPC to Edmonton will have an impact on the community. However, all indeterminate and term staff will have the opportunity to keep their jobs in Edmonton. They will be offered the opportunity to relocate their households, but may choose to continue their employment while commuting from their current residence. Approximately 33 of the CPC's term and indeterminate employees already live in Edmonton and commute to the office in Vegreville. The relocation of this office will also allow IRCC to continue to expand in the region and provide more employment opportunities for Albertans.

The announcement for the relocation was made as far in advance as possible with the intention of giving stakeholders, including employees and the community, enough time to prepare for the future.

Bilingualism: You raised concerns that IRCC has overstated its need to recruit and retain bilingual staff because existing bilingual CPC staff do not always work in French. 83 percent of positions in CPC Vegreville are unilingual English, compared to 43 percent across IRCC's Operations Sector. As mentioned above, the changing nature of IRCC's work will require a greater diversity in our staff who can respond to a variety of workloads from around the world. Anticipated changes in IRCC's workload will include a greater need for bilingual staff who have the flexibility to work in both official languages.

Satellite Office Proposal: During our conversation, you proposed an alternative to the relocation of the CPC to Edmonton that would involve opening a satellite office in Edmonton while maintaining the existing Vegreville location, thus creating two offices that would meet IRCC's business requirements. While it may appear to meet the stated business requirements, operating two offices in two locations would be operationally inefficient. It would increase the overall cost of operations through the duplication of administrative efforts to maintain a presence in Vegreville and the need to maintain two facilities.

Suppression of Employee Concerns: You have raised a concern that your members believe they are not allowed to voice their personal opinion about the relocation. While IRCC employees do have access to their bargaining agents as an avenue to voice their concerns, all public servants must adhere to the Values and Ethics Code for the Public Sector, as well as the requirements of the departmental Code of Conduct. Both of these instruments require public servants to avoid making adverse or inappropriate public comments, such as publicly criticizing the Government of Canada. We trust that you will continue to represent the interests of all represented employees at CPC Vegreville and bring matters to the attention of IRCC management through the normal channels.

Access to Information Requests: You have submitted requests for information under the *Access to Information Act* regarding the relocation, and are concerned with delays in obtaining some of this information. Each of these requests require significant time to collect the information, and for it to be prepared before release. Departmental officials have been instructed to respect the Access to Information process and legislated obligations, and to ensure that any outstanding requests are finalized and released as soon as possible.

In closing, we realize how difficult this decision is for the community of Vegreville and for many of the Department's employees. Please be reassured that the management of IRCC will endeavor to continue providing the staff at the CPC in Vegreville with significant support throughout this transition period.

We hope that the information provided is helpful in addressing your concerns.

Yours sincerely,



Stefanie Beck
Assistant Deputy Minister
Corporate Services



Robert Orr
Assistant Deputy Minister
Operations