

United States Senate

April 11, 2025

Todd Blanche
Deputy Attorney General of the United States
Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Deputy Attorney General Blanche,

We write to express our serious concern over the potential closure of the Department of Justice (DOJ) Antitrust Division's field offices. On March 25, 2025, you sent a letter to heads of department components discussing proposed Reductions in Force and Agency Reorganization Plans. Among other things, the letter proposed eliminating DOJ's antitrust field offices in Chicago, Illinois and San Francisco, California. While we understand the Administration's desire to cut costs and secure more affordable facilities, a closure of these two field offices would substantially weaken antitrust enforcement in two vital sectors of the economy: agriculture and tech.

The Chicago field office has played a critical role in enforcing our antitrust laws in the agricultural sector. For example, the office spearheaded the landmark prosecution of Archer Daniels Midland for price-fixing of animal feed additives, which culminated in the defendant pleading guilty and agreeing to pay the largest antitrust fine ever imposed at the time.¹ A number of other important agricultural antitrust cases have also emerged out of the Chicago field office.² And just last year, DOJ announced plans to create an enforcement team based in the Chicago field office that would focus solely on the agriculture industry.³

In her written answers to the Committee, now-Assistant Attorney General Slater specifically highlighted the agricultural industry as a top priority for the Antitrust Division.⁴ Some of the world's largest agricultural corporations are headquartered in the Midwest. And with over 127 million acres of agricultural land, the Corn Belt grows much of the food that feeds America. It is therefore crucial to maintain the presence of an antitrust enforcement team in the Midwest.

¹ Press Release, *Archer Daniels Midland Co. to Plead Guilty*, DOJ (Oct. 15, 1996), <https://www.justice.gov/archive/opa/pr/1996/Oct96/508at.htm>.

² The Chicago office "has investigated and prosecuted a wide range of international and domestic cartels, ranging from auto parts and lysine to flooring, asphalt, and collusion among sellers on Amazon Marketplace." Antitrust Division, *Chicago Office*, DOJ, <https://www.justice.gov/atr/chicago-office>.

³ Michael Kades, *Remarks as Prepared for Delivery*, DOJ (June 21, 2024), <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/speech/deputy-assistant-attorney-general-michael-kades-delivers-keynote-remarks-cattle-drives> ("I'm proud to announce today that we are using our increased funding to stand up a team of enforcers focused on agriculture. This team will be based out of Chicago, nearer to you and to the conduct they will police.").

⁴ Abigail Slater, *Questions for the Record*, DOJ (Feb. 12, 2025), https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2025-02-12_-_qfr_responses_-_slater.pdf.

Not only does maintaining the Chicago field office align with the Administration's stated aim of decentralizing power, it also allows those with relevant relationships and industry expertise to have boots on the ground, so they are near the conduct, people, and companies they police. The Midwest and rural America are home to some of the United States' most hardworking and bright people—including skilled antitrust enforcers. Closing the Chicago field office and moving the relevant work to Main Justice would narrow an experienced talent pool and reduce essential resources needed for complex antitrust cases.

The San Francisco field office has also maintained a key role in both civil and criminal enforcement. On the civil side, it focuses on key industries, such as technology and media. On the criminal side, the office prosecutes violations including bid-rigging and price-fixing. Two of the Division's largest recent criminal investigations—into packaged seafood and LCD panels—were led by the San Francisco office. In the packaged seafood cases, two companies and four individuals paid over \$125 million in fines, with one CEO sentenced to 40 months in prison. In the LCD panel cases, eight companies paid \$1.39 billion in fines and 13 executives served prison terms ranging from six months to three years.

The San Francisco field office's proximity to some of the world's largest technology firms—including Google, Apple, and Meta—makes its presence even more indispensable. As the Division pursues cases against Big Tech and addresses concerns over market concentration, maintaining a strong antitrust enforcement team in San Francisco is of utmost importance.

The closure of the Chicago and San Francisco offices would alternatively make it harder to hold monopolists accountable for their anticompetitive behavior. Look no further than the Obama Administration's closure of four of the Antitrust Division's seven field offices—in Atlanta, Cleveland, Dallas, and Philadelphia. These regional offices played a critical role in detecting and prosecuting local and regional antitrust violations, particularly criminal cartel cases, which often require close ties to local markets. By shuttering these offices, the Obama Administration weakened the Division's on-the-ground presence, thereby reducing deterrence and limiting the effectiveness of criminal enforcement efforts.

Now more than ever, antitrust enforcement is needed in the agricultural and technology sectors. Industries like meatpacking, fertilizers, and seeds are consolidating at an alarming rate.⁵ And Americans are struggling to afford their groceries. Additionally, the Antitrust Division has ongoing investigations into, and litigation against, large technology platforms. We have been working hard to provide legislative support in the fight against anticompetitive behavior; but at

⁵ See, e.g., Sen. Charles E. Grassley, *Grassley, Colleagues Lead Legislation to Stop Anticompetitive Practices in Meat-Packing Industry*, GRASSLEY.SENATE.GOV (Apr. 9, 2025), <https://www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/grassley-colleagues-lead-legislation-to-stop-anticompetitive-practices-in-meat-packing-industry-promote-fair-playing-field-for-livestock-producers>; Sen. Charles E. Grassley, *Celebrating American Agriculture*, GRASSLEY.SENATE.GOV (Mar. 24, 2023), <https://www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/qanda-celebrating-american-agriculture> (“Consolidation is making it harder for smaller producers to continue farming and for beginning farmers to get started.”); Sen. Charles E. Grassley, *Grassley to Garland: Investigation Needed in the Fertilizer Industry*, GRASSLEY.SENATE.GOV (Dec. 17, 2021), <https://www.grassley.senate.gov/news/news-releases/grassley-to-garland-investigation-needed-in-the-fertilizer-industry>.

Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche

April 11, 2025

Page 3

the end of the day, legislation will be of no help if antitrust laws are not vigorously enforced by those who have longstanding familiarity with the relevant industries.

Accordingly, we strongly urge you to reconsider the Department's plans to shut down these critical field offices. We should be ramping up our enforcement operations across America, not scaling them back. At a time when Americans are deeply concerned about food prices and the influence of Big Tech, DOJ must root out any anticompetitive behavior that drives up prices, decreases quality, or stifles innovation. Maintaining these field offices will further that objective.

Sincerely,



Charles Grassley
Chairman
Senate Judiciary Committee



Richard J. Durbin
Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Committee



Mike Lee
Chairman
Subcommittee on Antitrust,
Competition Policy, and
Consumer Rights
Senate Judiciary Committee

cc: Pamela Bondi, Attorney General, Department of Justice

Abigail Slater, Assistant Attorney General, Antitrust Division, Department of Justice

The Honorable Cory Booker, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Antitrust, Competition Policy, and Consumer Rights