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Department of Energy
Germantown, MD 20874-1290

SEP 18 1997

His Excellency Banny de Brum
Ambassador of the Republic of
the Marshall Islands
Embassy of the Republic of
the Marshall Islands
2433 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

This letter is written in response to the concerns raised in your letter of September 3, 1997, to Secretary Federico Peña regarding the possible elimination of Mr. Neil Barss' position as part of a departmental reduction in force (RIF). Mr. Barss has been a valuable member of our Department's Marshall Islands Program staff, and I thank you for taking the time to recognize his skills and accomplishments.

On September 5, 1997, the Secretary directed Department of Energy program managers not to issue the RIF notices that were scheduled to be sent to more than 1,500 Federal employees as a result of the deep budget cuts proposed by Congress. While the budget battle is not over, the Department is holding the notices back because we are hopeful, based on recent conversations with key Members of Congress, that the "worst case scenario" may not occur. Several key Members have indicated they will work to avoid a further RIF or to at least hold them to a minimum. As you well know, until Congress passes a final budget, nothing is certain, but we are cautiously optimistic about their efforts.

With regard to my office's Marshall Islands Program, I, too, do not want the potential RIF to have an adverse impact on the openness process that has been evolving regarding declassification of documents pertinent to atmospheric nuclear weapons testing in the Marshall Islands and the work that we have collectively accomplished to date. I am pleased to learn that you have found this effort so beneficial. As the Secretary continues his efforts to secure the best possible budget for the Department, I share your hope that a RIF can be avoided.

Sincerely,

Paul J. Seligman, M.D., M.P.H.
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Health Studies

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