

February 25, 2013

The Honorable Tim Johnson
Chairman, Senate Banking Committee
136 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Crapo
Ranking Member, Senate Banking Committee
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman, Senate Agriculture Committee
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture
Committee
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mark L. Pryor
Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee,
Subcommittee on Agriculture
255 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations
Committee, Subcommittee on Agriculture
260 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

On March 27, 2013, the USDA Rural Housing Service (RHS) will revise the list of communities that qualify as “rural” for the purposes of its programs based on data from the 2010 Census. As a result, more than 900 rural communities will lose access to vital RHS housing programs. On that date, provisions enacted by Congress more than 20 years ago will expire, and the eligibility for these programs will revert to a definition created back in 1974. Congress must act quickly to address the needs of Americans living in rural areas.

Programs such as Sections 502, 515, and 538 provide direct and guaranteed loans for both single and multifamily housing. Across rural America, these programs provide both rental and homeownership housing opportunities for rural families. In today’s nascent housing recovery, access to these programs is crucial.

We understand that there are efforts in Congress to address rural housing reforms. In fact, in the 112th Congress, the Senate passed language as part of its Farm Bill. We look forward to working with you to update the definition of “rural community” to meet today’s demographic trends, but we must be aware that the March 27 deadline is fast approaching. The housing recovery in many rural communities depends on the RHS programs and, for that reason, Congress needs to pass a short-term extension of the eligibility of communities currently participating in RHS’ programs until the end of the Fiscal Year, while an update to the definition is debated.

We are not looking to expand any program or authorize any additional funding. We simply wish to retain the current pool of eligible communities. As our nation struggles to recover from our economic crisis, our rural communities and their families need these programs more than ever. The time to act is now.

Sincerely,

Community Mortgage Lenders of America
Council for Affordable and Rural Housing
Institute of Real Estate Management
Leading Builders of America
Mortgage Bankers Association
National Affordable Housing Management Association
National Apartment Association
National Association of Home Builders
National Association of REALTORS®
National Leased Housing Association
National Multi Housing Council