



May 1, 2017

Senator Thad Cochran
Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Representative Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chair, House Committee on Appropriations
2306 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Senator Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Appropriations
437 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Representative Nita Lowey
Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations
2365 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Cochran, Chairman Frelinghuysen, Ranking Member Leahy, and Ranking Member Lowey:

On behalf of the Campaign for Renewed Rural Development (CRRD) – a diverse coalition of national organizations supporting a renewed and vibrant rural America – we urge your strong support for key rural infrastructure and economic development programs in the fiscal year 2018 appropriations process.

Unfortunately, the Administration has proposed to eliminate several programs designed to help provide critical services and investments to rural communities. This letter is meant to highlight several key federal programs and priorities for CRRD member organizations and rural communities everywhere. **As we enter this year's budget season, we hope you will continue working to strengthen these critical investments in rural communities.**

Under the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Rural Water and Wastewater Program increases access to clean and affordable water in rural communities. More than 98 percent of rural Americans currently receive their drinking water from small systems and USDA's Water and Wastewater Program helps assure the highest quality of drinking water to rural America where the cost of operating and maintaining these systems is significantly higher than that of urban areas.

Eliminating the Water and Wastewater Grant and Loan program would result in a loss of \$1.6 billion in construction projects and create an unsustainable infrastructure funding deficit that would have a devastating impact on rural America.

Also under USDA, **the Rural Business and Cooperative Service (RBS) helps create tens of thousands of jobs in rural America each year** by providing access to capital for small business owners including approximately \$1 billion in guaranteed loans from commercial lenders utilizing the Business and Industry loan program. Additionally, RBS programs such as the Value-added Producer Grant Program and the Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program have a proven track record of success – both in terms of business survivability rates and job creation. Drastic cuts to or elimination of these vital programs will have lasting impacts on rural economies at a time when they are needed most.

The Economic Development Administration (EDA) is also critical for ensuring economic opportunity and stability in rural America. The EDA provides competitive grants to help generate or retain jobs, attract new industry and private sector investment, encourage business expansion and serves as a back stop to sudden and severe economic impacts.

Additionally, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program helps rural communities to improve housing and living conditions and expand economic opportunities for low and moderate income persons. Over 20 percent of

CDBG funding each year goes to rural communities to help fund community, infrastructure and economic development projects.

Today our rural communities continue to struggle with population loss, the opioid epidemic, and currently, a downturn in the farm economy. Therefore, rural America depends on a strong federal partner now more than ever to help make essential investments in critical infrastructure and economic development efforts.

Congress has long recognized the value of programs that serve rural America, and has consistently supported funding to help small and rural communities improve existing infrastructure, attract good paying jobs, and protect valuable community resources.

We look forward to a continued partnership and stand ready to work with you to help provide these and other critical programs and services to rural America.

Sincerely,

Center for Rural Affairs
Fair Food Network
Housing Assistance Council
Independent Community Bankers of America
National Association of Counties
National Association of Development Organizations
National Association of Towns and Townships
National League of Cities
National Rural Electric Cooperative Association
National Rural Water Association
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Rural Community Assistance Partnership
State Agriculture and Rural Leaders
Tennessee Association of Utility Districts