



April 26, 2024

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As Congress considers Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations, we write on behalf of our rural constituents to ensure that any final package provides a strong framework to support American agricultural producers, enhance sustainable land-use practices, protect Americans from hunger, and invest in our rural communities. As New Democrat Coalition Members we are committed to finding bipartisan solutions that empower all of our constituents and look forward to engaging with the committee to deliver federal funding for Fiscal Year 2025.

Rural Housing

The federal government plays a critical role in underpinning rural economies and the farm workforce by bolstering housing stock and affordability. In support of rural housing, we ask that the Committee provide robust funding in line with the President's FY25 Budget request of:

- \$1.69 billion for U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) rental assistance in the Section 521 program;
- \$30 million for Section 504 Very Low-Income Repair Grants;
- \$25 million for Section 514 Farm Labor Housing Loans;
- \$70 million for Section 515 Multifamily Housing Direct Loans; and
- \$90 million for the Multifamily Preservation and Revitalization Demonstration.

This assistance is critical to housing our farm workforce, securing our food supply chains, and providing housing in rural communities. Further, they provide a crucial buttress to help keep farm workers, seniors, and economically disadvantaged in their own homes.

Rural Utilities and Broadband

Federal funds also help rural Americans afford their energy and broadband utility costs and aids in providing energy and information connections to communities where providers would otherwise not affordably offer services. Additionally, these funds can help rural communities and co-ops make efficiency improvements to unlock tools such as tax credits from the Inflation

Reduction Act (IRA). In promotion of rural energy and information connectivity, we ask the Committee to consider supporting funding for these programs:

- \$1 billion in lending authority at the Rural Energy for America (REAP) Program;
- \$6.5 billion in lending authority for rural electric loans;
- \$53 million in zero-interest loans for the Rural Energy Savings Program;
- \$112.4 million for the ReConnect program; and
- \$60 million for Distance Learning and Telemedicine grants.

These energy and broadband programs are critical to supporting Americans during a time of increased costs, and in making sure they can access the services they need no matter where they live.

Natural Resources and Environmental Programs

Rural Americans act as stewards to thousands of acres of land, forests, and waterways. While they provide all Americans with the food and energy we need, they also responsibly manage these resources and should be rewarded for it. The Inflation Reduction Act advanced critical programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Regional Conservation Partnership Program, and Conservation Stewardship Program that provide incentives and rewards for voluntary environmentally friendly activities. The Committee should continue to promote these programs and the massive demand for these federal dollars by increasing investment to better meet programmatic needs.

Rural Economic Development

Federal funds are critical to supporting rural communities and facilities so that rural Americans have access to infrastructure that meets their needs and the high quality of life they deserve. We encourage the Committee to provide strong funding for the Community Facilities Program, meeting or exceeding the FY24 program level of \$2.8 billion in loans and \$650 million in guaranteed loans.

Further, we encourage the Committee to bolster funding for historically marginalized groups, including Indian Tribes, and for new and beginning farmers. This should include robust funding for Rural Cooperative Development Grants, with set-asides for minority producers, Agriculture Innovation Centers, and the Value-Added Producer Grants Program. We also encourage the Committee to support the President's FY25 Budget request, which includes \$7.1 billion across USDA to lower barriers for underserved communities, and \$3.7 billion to benefit American Indians and Alaska Natives, and other Tribal communities.

Outside of the FY25 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Appropriations Bill, we encourage the Committee to support vigorous funding for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. This program provides numerous benefits to rural communities in areas such as infrastructure development, housing, and public safety, and should include a set-aside for Tribal nations above the FY24 level of \$75 million.

Tribal nations administer large public resources and infrastructure, not only for Tribal citizens, and we encourage the Committee to bolster these critical resources in the CDBG program.

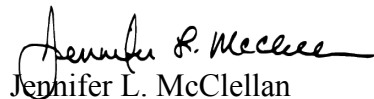
Lastly, we encourage the Committee to strongly consider \$200 million in funding for the RECOMPETE grant program, level with FY 2023 funding. This critical program is the most applied to program in the history of the Economic Development Administration and offers essential support to help rural economies.

Rural Americans provide the country and the world with the food and fuel we need and far too often are not recognized for their efforts. We hope the Committee will support these commonsense programs to uplift rural communities and enable them to better share in our national life.

Sincerely,



Donald G. Davis
Member of Congress



Jennifer L. McClellan
Member of Congress



Wiley Nickel
Member of Congress



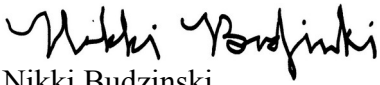
Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



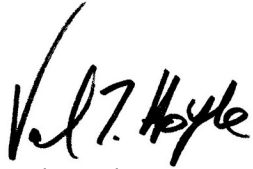
Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



Nikki Budzinski
Member of Congress



Troy A. Carter, Sr.
Member of Congress



Val Hoyle
Member of Congress



Brittany Petersen
Member of Congress



Eric Sorensen
Member of Congress



Greg Stanton
Member of Congress



Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress



Patrick Ryan
Member of Congress



Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress