

Support Funding for Small and Rural Water Projects

Dear Colleague:

Please join us in urging the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee to include robust funding for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Water and Sewer Loan and Grant program, the Circuit Rider program, and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) Grassroots Source Water Protection program in their FY 2018 appropriations bill.

Small and rural communities have an important public responsibility of complying with all applicable federal Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act regulations in order to supply the public with safe drinking water and sanitation. Most U.S. water utilities are small; 91 percent of the country's 50,366 drinking water systems serve communities with fewer than 10,000 people and 80 percent of the country's 16,255 wastewater systems serve fewer than 10,000 people.

Unfortunately, due to limited economies of scale and lack of technical expertise, small and rural communities often have difficulty complying with federal mandates. USDA's Water and Sewer Loan and Grant, Circuit Rider, and Farm Service Agency (FSA) Grassroots Source Water Protection programs are essential in helping small and rural communities overcome their limitations in providing safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation.

Please join us in signing onto this letter (text below) by contacting Kana Smith on Rep. Hanabusa's staff at Kana.Smith@mail.house.gov or Zach Howell on Rep. Katko's staff at Zach.Howell@mail.house.gov. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Colleen Hanabusa
Member of Congress

John Katko
Member of Congress

March XX, 2017

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
2362-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1126 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member Bishop,

We would like to thank the Members of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee for their continued support of vital water infrastructure and technical assistance funding for rural and small communities through programs under the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). As the subcommittee moves forward with the consideration of agriculture appropriations for fiscal year (FY) 2018, we write to respectfully urge you to include \$600 million, \$17.4 million, and \$6.5 million for USDA's Water and Sewer Loan and Grant, Circuit Rider, and Farm Service Agency (FSA) Grassroots Source Water Protection programs, respectively.

Small and rural communities have an important public responsibility of complying with all applicable federal Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act regulations in order to supply the public with safe drinking water and sanitation. Most U.S. water utilities are small; 91 percent of the country's 50,366 drinking water systems serve communities with fewer than 10,000 people and 80 percent of the country's 16,255 wastewater systems serve fewer than 10,000 people. Unfortunately, due to limited economies of scale and lack of technical expertise, small and rural communities often have difficulty complying with federal mandates. USDA's Water and Sewer Loan and Grants Circuit Rider, and Farm Service Agency (FSA) Grassroots Source Water Protection programs are essential in helping small and rural communities overcome their limitations in providing safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation.

USDA's Water and Sewer Loan and Grant program helps to construct water and wastewater infrastructure through grants and loans provided at reasonable rates and terms. As of February 1, 2017, the backlog for the USDA's Water and Sewer Loan and Grant program currently includes 805 community applications, of which 618 are for low interest loans totaling \$1,637,039,163 and 612 are for grants totaling \$596,784,575. This backlog equals a grand total of \$2,233,823,738 and represents small and rural community water infrastructure projects that are unable to access alternative sources of funding. Without this assistance, many communities would not have the means to construct new water systems, expand existing ones, or comply with mandates. Thus, we respectfully urge the subcommittee to include \$600 million in the FY 2018 appropriations for USDA's Water and Sewer Loan and Grant program to adequately address the current USDA backlog.

The USDA Circuit Rider program is one of the most successful local initiatives that the USDA operates with appropriated funds to provide necessary technical expertise and training to rural communities. This program provides the primary support for communities to operate safe and clean drinking water systems, and helps to ensure compliance with current water regulations. Circuit riders are in the field every day helping these communities with water system compliance, operations, maintenance, management, and training. This assistance protects the sizable investment the federal government has made in rural water infrastructure. We respectfully request the USDA Circuit Rider program to be funded at a minimum of \$17.4 million to continue maintaining the number of full-time employees necessary to fulfill the important mission of this program.

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) Grassroots Source Water Protection Program provides our rural communities with the technical assistance necessary to improve water quality and provide safe drinking water. The source water program provides each state with one full-time staff member to coordinate and assist our rural communities in the implementation of source water protections plans. Without adequate funding for the Grassroots Source Water Protection Program, water quality in rural communities across the nation will be at risk. Thus, we respectfully request that the subcommittee continue funding this program at \$6.5 million.

State rural water associations have continually utilized the resources provided under these programs to serve millions of Americans across the nation, including the U.S. territories. A failure to properly fund these programs will cause irreparable and long lasting harm to these water systems and the Americans who rely on them. We appreciate your consideration and your immediate attention to these programs.

Sincerely,

Colleen Hanabusa
Member of Congress

John Katko
Member of Congress