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May 25, 2017

The Honorable Rodney P. Frelinghuysen
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
2306 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
2365 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
2407 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives:

The more than 1.2 million members of the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR) strongly support the programs of the Rural Housing Service (RHS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). RHS provides critical programs for the 20 percent of the U.S. population that live in rural areas and small towns. NAR is concerned with the changes proposed in the USDA Report to Congress on the entitled: "Proposed 2017 Reorganization of the Department of Agriculture to Establish an Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agriculture Affairs". This proposal would eliminate the Under Secretary for Rural Development; a move REALTORS® believe would diminish the effectiveness of programs like the RHS.

As you know, finding safe and affordable housing remains a challenge in rural communities where rental housing is often limited and access to mortgage financing can be challenging. Housing choices can be limited due to differences in infrastructure requirements, lack of public transit, and access to other amenities. Rural Americans rely on programs like the 502 Rural Housing Loan Program to provide financing that can be difficult to access in rural communities. Section 502 loans can be used to build, repair, renovate or relocate a home, or to purchase and prepare sites, including providing water and sewage facilities.

RHS also provides rental assistance for millions of America's rural families. Without this program, many multifamily properties would never be located in these rural areas. In FY 15 alone, RHS built or revitalized over 10,840 units of multifamily housing and supported 249,000 rural families with limited means to pay rent by providing rental assistance and vouchers.

Creating an Under Secretary of Trade does not obligate USDA to eliminate an Under Secretary or downgrade any other mission area. NAR urges you to retain the Under Secretary for Rural Development position, as well as the critical mission of these valuable RHS programs.

Sincerely,

William E. Brown
2017 President, National Association of REALTORS®

cc: House Committee on Appropriations



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