June 15, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman, Subcommittee on Agriculture
Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture
Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman Hoeven and Ranking Member Merkley:

The Housing Assistance Council (HAC) is among the 578+ organizations urging Congress to oppose the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 budget for Rural Development. With a deepening opioid crisis and a frayed rural social fabric in the national spotlight, Congress should support rural America by maintaining all rural development programs funded at no less than the FY 17 level. Congress should further affirm support for rural America by rejecting USDA’s reorganization plan which would reduce Rural Development’s visibility and viability via the elimination of the Senate-confirmed Under Secretary for Rural Development position.

HAC is a 45-year-old national nonprofit devoted to improving the housing conditions of the rural poor. HAC has consistently championed USDA’s rural housing and development programs because they help improve the quality of life and self-sufficiency of rural residents and their communities. Moreover, the delivery of USDA Rural Development services via localized field offices allows for powerful partnerships and responsiveness to local priorities.

Over HAC’s history, USDA’s Rural Housing Service (and its predecessor agency) has been a steadfast partner, with USDA support assisting HAC in bringing capacity and financing to a robust network of rural and tribal partners. HAC and our partners are concerned that the budget and reorganization proposal combined with proposed deep cuts to federal programs beyond USDA (e.g., Community Development Block Grants) would undermine future progress while unraveling past investments.
While HAC’s network is particularly interested in programs within the Rural Housing Service’s purview, the concerns go deeper. Rural water and sewer programs, for example, are integral to the survival of the communities where HAC works—especially in areas of persistent poverty, which are disproportionately located in rural and tribal areas. And USDA’s rural business and utilities programs help attract commerce and investment to areas where HAC works.

Over HAC’s history, USDA Rural Development programs have enjoyed bipartisan support from Congress, largely because the results of such investment are apparent across rural America. Such support is more important now than ever.

Sincerely,

Moises Loza
Executive Director