

# NATIONAL RURAL HOUSING COALITION

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April 18, 2021

The Honorable Elizabeth Warren  
U.S. Senate  
309 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Warren:

I write on behalf of the National Rural Housing Coalition (NRHC), a national membership organization that advocates for policies and programs to improve housing conditions in rural communities. NRHC is pleased to endorse the American Housing and Economic Mobility Act (AHEMA) of 2021. Your legislation is a sorely needed response to the lack of affordable housing in America.

Of particular interest to NRHC are the provisions increasing the rural housing programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The AHEMA authorizes an historic investment that will improve the quality of rural housing and decrease housing costs for rural families.

Over the years, federal rural housing programs have made affordable housing opportunities available to millions of low-income families, financing more than 2 million home mortgages and some 500,000 units of affordable rental housing. However, over the last 20 years rural housing assistance has slowed to a trickle. Funding for rural home loans for low-income families, affordable rental and farmworker housing and related assistance when adjusted for inflation is down by over 60 percent. As a result, USDA finances less than 7,000 home mortgages a year for low-income homeowners. Due to these budget cuts, Agriculture does not provide any direct loans for construction of new affordable rental housing, provides little in the way of preserving existing multifamily housing and annually builds only about 200 units of housing for migrant and seasonal farmworkers.

It is evident that rural America needs improved housing:

- A disproportionate amount of the nation's occupied substandard housing is located in rural areas. As reported by the Housing Assistance Council, the 2010 Census revealed that of the approximately 116 million occupied housing units available in the United States, 25 million units are located in rural and small communities. Over 5 percent, or 1.5 million, of these homes are considered either moderately or severely substandard. Although most Americans take indoor plumbing and potable water at the tap for granted, it is unavailable to 4 percent of rural occupied units;
- According to a report by the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, 41 percent (5 million) of rural renters are cost-burdened, meaning that they pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing costs, and 21 percent (2.1 million households) of rural households

that rent pay more than 50 percent of their income for housing; and

- Finally, the lack of decent housing is increasingly an obstacle to economic growth. The Wall Street Journal found that the number of rural homes built in 2010 totaled only 14 percent of the United States total and that number has fallen to 10 percent in recent years. *“In short, fewer homes are being built per household than any other time in US history and it is even worse in rural areas. As a result of that lack of housing, employers with available jobs cannot find workers because they have no place to live”.*<sup>1</sup>

Against this backdrop, both successive Congresses and administrations have diminished or ignored rural housing needs by slashing budgets for USDA home ownership and rental housing programs.

We have long argued that federal rural housing programs are successful and that what was needed, more than anything else, was a commitment to provide a level of resources adequate to respond to the housing crisis in our nation’s small towns and farming communities. Your bill does just that.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue. We look forward to working with you to improve housing conditions for rural and urban households across America.

Sincerely



Robert A. Rapoza  
Executive Secretary

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<sup>1</sup> Raice, Shayndi. "Rural America Has jobs. Now It just Needs Housing." *WallStreetjournal* 30 May 2018.