

December 6th, 2024

The Honorable Tom Carper
Chair, Senate Committee on Environment
and Public Works
United States Senate

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chair, House Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Environment and Public Works
United States Senate

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member, House Committee on
Transportation and Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives

Dear Chairs Carper and Graves and Ranking Members Capito and Larsen:

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to express our strong support for the Water Resources Development Act of 2024, particularly its provisions to reauthorize and strengthen the Economic Development Administration's (EDA) capacity to serve rural, distressed, and energy transition communities. As an organization dedicated to building an empowered, thriving, and equitable rural America, we believe this legislation takes important steps toward addressing the unique challenges facing our rural communities.

We are particularly encouraged by several key provisions that align with our mission of catalyzing rural revitalization in marginalized communities:

The establishment of regional Technical Assistance Liaisons and the commitment to maintaining Economic Development Representatives in underresourced communities will help ensure rural communities have the support they need to access and effectively utilize federal resources. Too often, rural communities lack the capacity to navigate complex federal programs – these positions will help bridge that gap.

The creation of the Office of Tribal Economic Development represents a critical step toward addressing the unique economic development needs of Tribal communities, many of which are located in rural areas. This aligns with our belief that those most affected by injustice should lead the work for creating change.

We strongly support the legislation's emphasis on economic resiliency as an investment priority. Our research shows that rural Americans feel the economic system is rigged against them, with 77 percent believing Congress

prioritizes tax breaks for the wealthy over rural investment. This focus on resiliency, combined with the specific attention to underserved and coal communities, which are disproportionately rural, represents an important shift toward economic development in places that need it most.

The directive for the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to study economic impact on rural communities will provide valuable data to inform future policy decisions and ensure federal programs are effectively serving rural areas. This kind of evidence-based policymaking is essential for building the resilient, welcoming, and equitable communities we envision.

As an organization committed to rebuilding rural America through progressive policy reforms, we see this legislation as an important step forward. However, we also recognize that sustained engagement and support will be necessary to ensure these programs reach their full potential in serving rural communities.

We urge swift passage of this legislation and stand ready to work with Congress and the EDA to ensure its successful implementation in rural communities across America.

Sincerely,

RuralProgress
Appalachian Citizens' Law Center
Coalición de pequeños agricultores en California
Eastern Kentucky CLT
Faith in Place
Latino Farmers & Ranchers International, Inc.
Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecroppers Fund, Inc.
Rural Coalition
Rural Community Assistance Partnership
RuralOrganizing.org