

Statement from Rural Housing Stakeholders on the 21st Century ROAD to Housing Package

Housing is the largest monthly expense for American families, and the housing affordability crisis is as urgent in small town and rural America as it is in the nation's cities and suburbs. Over one-third of rural households are considered housing cost-burdened—paying more than 30 percent of their income toward rent or a mortgage. That's why, as rural housing stakeholders, we applaud the bipartisan 21st Century ROAD to Housing package, a significant step toward strengthening housing supply, preservation, and affordability in rural communities across the country.

Rural America faces distinct housing challenges—aging housing stock, limited rental options, infrastructure gaps, and barriers to homeownership—that require solutions designed with rural communities in mind. The 21st Century ROAD to Housing package responds to those realities with targeted investments and long-overdue program modernizations that will better serve rural families, seniors, and workers.

Critically, the legislation includes the Rural Housing Service Reform Act, which, among other common-sense reforms to the USDA's housing programs, would provide permanent authorization for proven strategies to leverage private capital to preserve the agency's nearly 400,000 affordable 515 multifamily housing units at risk of exiting the portfolio. The owners of 515 properties, private investors in Low Income Housing Tax Credit and Opportunity Zones, non-profit and public sector entities seeking to maintain these projects' long-term affordability, and most of all, the low-income tenants of 515 properties, need certainty that these strategies will remain a part of the rural housing finance landscape for the long term.

Other key provisions would help rural communities address their disproportionate repair needs generated by aging housing stock often coupled with low home values, preserve and expand their essential manufactured housing stock, and confront less red tape around environmental reviews where USDA and HUD jointly fund a housing project.

We commend leaders in both parties and both chambers for working across differences to advance a comprehensive housing package. The rural provisions of the 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act demonstrate a bipartisan understanding that where someone lives should not determine whether they have access to safe, affordable, and stable housing. For this reason, we encourage swift passage of this legislation.

