

From: William Watson [wwatson@ckbonline.com]
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To: Comments OTS
Subject: EGRPRA Review of Consumer Protection Lending Related Rules

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Dear OTS:

As a community banker, I am continuously frustrated by the total absurdity of certain regulations. They impede our ability to serve our customers, add great cost to our operations, and are simply not reconcilable to common sense.

The community banking industry is slowly being crushed under the cumulative weight of regulatory burden, something that must be addressed by Congress and the regulatory agencies before it is too late. This is especially true for consumer protection lending rules, which though well intentioned, unnecessarily increase costs for consumers and prevent banks from serving customers. While each individual requirement may not be overly burdensome in and of itself, the cumulative impact of consumer lending rules, by driving up costs and slowing processing time for loans from legitimate lenders, helps create a fertile ground for predatory lenders. It's time to acknowledge that consumer protection regulations are not only a burden to banks but are also a problem for consumers.

Truth in Lending (Federal Reserve Regulation Z)

Right of Rescission. One of the most burdensome requirements is the three-day right of rescission under Regulation Z. Many of you probably are too young to remember that this law came about from a CBS Sixty Minutes expose about asbestos siding salesmen going door to door and getting home-owners to sign high priced contracts to do work on their homes, and the contracts were actually real estate mortgages. The national hoopla about it inspired our congress to score some points with the public and pass the three day rescission rule, but forgot that banks were not the ones causing the problem, but nevertheless included banks in the new law. Rarely, if ever, does a consumer exercise the right. Consumers resent having to wait three additional days to receive loan proceeds after the loan is closed, and they often blame the bank for "withholding" their funds. Even though this is a statutory requirement, inflexibility in the regulation making it difficult to waive the right of rescission aggravates the problem. If not outright repealed, depository institutions should at least be given much greater latitude to allow customers to waive the right. Frankly, the rule could simply be eliminated, and any bank who failed to allow a borrower to "change his mind" and cancel a transaction, could be punished by the regulators, upon a complaint being filed by a borrower.

Finance Charges. Please do not once again talk about "simplifying" the Reg Z rules. Apparently "simplification" doesn't mean "simplification" when imposed by a regulatory agency. It simply means more and more pages

of beauracritize. Simply ask each bank to tell the customer in Simple interest language the cost of their loan, and not try to enforce rules that might effect this number by .000000001%. Most states already have statutory limits on "fees" so maybe they don't "need" to be included in Reg Z calculations.

"Adverse action" notices are also a frustration. You already have spent a fair amount of time taking a borrowers' application, reviewing it, and denying it. To add additional "notice" requirements on the lender seems a little like "piling on."

Credit Opportunity Act (Federal Reserve Regulation B) has so many nebulous provisions that a Philadelphia lawyer would be required to figure out exactly when which items are triggered, and which are not.

Regulation B creates a number of compliance problems and burdens for banks. Knowing when an application has taken place, for instance, is often difficult because the line between an inquiry and an application is not clearly defined.

Spousal Signature. Another problem is the issue of spousal signatures. The requirements make it difficult and almost require all parties - and their spouses - come into the bank personally to complete documents. This makes little sense as the world moves toward new technologies that do not require physical presence to apply for a loan.

Adverse Action Notices. Another problem is the adverse action notice. It would be preferable if banks could work with customers and offer them alternative loan products if they do not qualify for the type of loan for which they originally applied. However, that may then trigger requirements to supply adverse action notices. For example, it may be difficult to decide whether an application is truly incomplete or whether it can be considered "withdrawn." A straightforward rule on when an adverse action notice must be sent - that can easily be understood - should be developed.

Other Issues. Regulation B's requirements also complicate other instances of customer relations. For example, to offer special accounts for seniors, a bank is limited by restrictions in the regulation. And, most important, reconciling the regulation's requirements not to maintain information on the gender or race of a borrower and the need to maintain sufficient information to identify a customer under section 326 of the USA PATRIOT Act is difficult and needs better regulatory guidance.

Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) (Federal Reserve Regulation C)

Exemptions. The HMDA requirements are the one area subject to the current comment period that does not provide specific protections for individual consumers. HMDA is primarily a data-collection and reporting requirement and therefore lends itself much more to a tiered regulatory requirement. The current exemption for banks with less than \$33 million in assets is far too low and should be increased to at least \$250 million.

Volume of Data. The volume of the data that must be collected and reported is clearly burdensome. Ironically, at a time when regulators are reviewing burden, the burden associated with HMDA data collection was only recently increased substantially. Consumer activists are constantly

clamoring for additional data and the recent changes to the requirements acceded to their demands without a clear cost-benefit analysis. All consumers ultimately pay for the data collection and reporting in higher costs, and regulators should recognize that.

Certain data collection requirements are difficult to apply in practice and therefore add to regulatory burden and the potential for error, e.g., assessing loans against HOEPA (the Home Owners Equity Protection Act) and reporting rate spreads; determining the date the interest rate on a loan was set; determining physical property address or census tract information in rural areas, etc.

Flood Insurance

The current flood insurance regulations create difficulties with customers, who often do not understand why flood insurance is required and that the federal government - not the bank - imposes the requirement. The government needs to do a better job of educating consumers to the reasons and requirements of flood hazard insurance. Flood insurance requirements should be streamlined and simplified to be understandable.

Additional Comments

It would be much easier for banks, especially community banks that have limited resources, to comply with regulatory requirements if requirements were based on products and all rules that apply to a specific product were consolidated in one place. Second, regulators require banks to provide customers with understandable disclosures and yet do not hold themselves to the same standard in drafting regulations that can be easily understood by bankers. Finally, examiner training needs to be improved to ensure that regulatory requirements are properly - and uniformly - applied.

Conclusion

The volume of regulatory requirements facing the banking industry today presents a daunting task for any institution, but severely saps the resources of community banks. We need help immediately with this burden before it is too late. Community bankers are in close proximity to their customers, understand the special circumstances of the local community and provide a more responsive level of service than megabanks. However, community banks cannot continue to compete effectively and serve their customers and communities without some relief from the crushing burden of regulation. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

William W. Watson