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**Evans, Sandra E**

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**From:** Ted Wysocki [tedwysocki@prodigy.net]  
**Sent:** Friday, March 26, 2004 6:55 PM  
**To:** Office Thrift Supervision  
**Subject:** Comments No. 2004-04

March 26, 2004

Regulation Comments, Attention: No. 2004-04  
Chief Counsel's Office  
Office of Thrift Supervision  
1700 G Street NW  
Washington DC 20552

As a member of the National Community Reinvestment Coalition and a former member of the Federal Reserve Board's Consumer Advisory Council, I urge you to withdraw the proposed changes to the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) regulations. CRA has been instrumental in increasing access to homeownership, boosting economic development, and expanding small businesses in the nation's minority, immigrant, and low- and moderate-income communities. Your proposed changes are contrary to the CRA statute because they will halt the progress made in community reinvestment.

Oppose Proposal for Streamlined and Cursory Exams.

The proposed changes will eliminate the investment and service parts of the CRA exam for banks and thrifts with assets between \$250 and \$500 million. The proposed changes would reduce the rigor of CRA exams for 1,111 banks that account for more than \$387 billion in assets.

The elimination of the investment and service tests for more than 1,100 banks translates into considerably less access to banking services and capital for underserved communities. For example, these banks would no longer be held accountable under CRA exams for investing in Low Income Housing Tax Credits, which have been a major source of affordable rental housing needed by large numbers of immigrants and lower income segments of the minority population. Likewise, the banks would no longer be held accountable for the provision of bank branches, checking accounts, Individual Development Accounts (IDAs), or debit card services. Moreover, the federal bank agencies will fail to enforce CRA's statutory requirement that banks have a continuing and affirmative obligation to serve credit and deposit needs if they eliminate the investment and service test for a large subset of depository institutions.

Predatory Lending Standards Inadequate

The proposed CRA changes also contain an anti-predatory screen that will actually perpetuate abusive lending. The proposed standard states that loans based on the foreclosure value of the collateral, instead of the ability of the borrower to repay, can result in downgrades in CRA ratings. The asset-based standard falls short because it will not cover many instances of predatory lending. For example, abusive lending would not result in lower CRA ratings when it strips equity without leading to delinquency or foreclosure. In other words, borrowers can have the necessary income to afford monthly payments, but they are still losing wealth as a result of a lender's excessive fees or unnecessary products.

CRA exams will allow abusive lending if they contain the proposed anti-predatory standard that does not address the problems of the packing of fees into mortgage loans, high prepayment penalties, loan

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flipping, mandatory arbitration, and other numerous abuses. Rigorous fair lending audits and severe penalties on CRA exams for abusive lending are necessary in order to ensure that the new minority homeowners served by the Administration are protected, but the proposed predatory lending standard will not provide the necessary protections. In addition, an anti-predatory standard must apply to all loans made by the bank and all of its affiliates, not just real-estate secured loans issued by the bank in its "assessment area" as proposed by the agencies. By shielding banks from the consequences of abusive lending, the proposed standard will frustrate CRA's statutory requirement that banks serve low- and moderate-income communities consistent with safety and soundness.

Support Enhanced Small Business Loan Disclosure. The federal agencies propose that they will publicly report the specific census tract location of small businesses receiving loans in addition to the current items in the CRA small business data for each depository institution. This will improve the ability of the general public to determine if banks are serving traditionally neglected neighborhoods with small business loans.

Missed Opportunity to Update Exam Procedures: The agencies also failed to close gaping loopholes in the CRA regulation. Banks can still elect to include affiliates on CRA exams at their option. They can thus manipulate their CRA exams by excluding affiliates not serving low- and moderate-income borrowers and excluding affiliates engaged in predatory lending. The game playing with affiliates will end only if the federal agencies require that all affiliates be included on exams. Lastly, the proposed changes do not address the need to update assessment areas to include geographical areas beyond bank branches. Many banks make considerable portions of their loans beyond their branches; this non-branch lending activity will not be scrutinized by CRA exams.

Don't Undercut CRA!

CRA is simply a law that makes capitalism work for all Americans. CRA is too vital to be gutted by harmful regulatory changes and neglect. Reconsider your proposed changes and issue new rules that will make CRA more effective.

Sincerely,

Ted Wysocki  
President & CEO  
Local Economic & Employment Development [LEED] Council  
Chicago, IL

Cc:  
National Community Reinvestment Coalition