



Atlantic Stewardship Bank

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April-28, 2004

Regulation Comments
Chief Counsel's Office
Office of Thrift Supervision
1700 G Street, NW
Washington DC 20552

Attention: No. 2004-04

Dear Sir or Madam:

As a community banker, I strongly endorse the federal bank regulators' proposal to increase the asset size of banks eligible for the small bank streamlined Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) examination from \$250 million to \$500 million and elimination of the holding company size limit (currently \$1 billion). This proposal will greatly reduce regulatory burden. I am the President/CEO of Atlantic Stewardship Bank, a \$400 million dollar bank located in Midland Park, New Jersey.

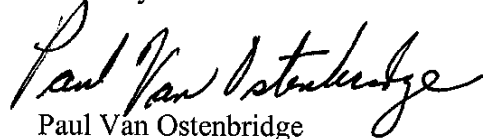
The small bank CRA examination process was an excellent innovation. As a community banker, I applaud the agencies for recognizing that it is time to expand this critical burden reduction benefit to larger community banks. At this critical time for the economy, this will allow more community banks to focus on what they do best—fueling America's local economies. When a bank must comply with the requirements of the large bank CRA evaluation process, the costs and burdens increase dramatically. And the resources devoted to CRA compliance are resources not available for meeting the credit demands of the community. For example in my Bank we estimate the costs associated with the large bank CRA requirements to increase by \$120,000 over our current CRA Program as a small bank.

Adjusting the asset size limit also more accurately reflects significant changes and consolidation within the banking industry in the last 10 years. To be fair, banks should be evaluated against their peers, not banks hundreds of times their size. The proposed change recognizes that it's not right to assess the CRA performance of a \$500 million dollar bank or a \$1 billion dollar bank with the same exam procedures used for a \$500 billion dollar bank. Large banks now stretch from coast-to-coast with assets in the hundreds of billions of dollars. It is not fair to rate a community bank using the same CRA examination. And, while the proposed increase is a good first step, the size of banks eligible for the small bank streamlined CRA examination should be increased to \$2 billion, or at a minimum, \$1 billion.

Increasing the size of banks eligible for the small-bank streamlined CRA examination does not relieve banks from CRA responsibilities. Since the survival of many community banks is closely intertwined with the success and viability of their communities, the increase will merely eliminate some of the most burdensome requirements.

In summary, I believe that increasing the asset-size of banks eligible for the small bank streamlined CRA examination process is an important first step to reducing regulatory burden. I also support eliminating the separate holding company qualification for the streamlined examination, since it places small community banks that are part of a larger holding company at a disadvantage to their peers. While community banks still must comply with the general requirements of CRA, this change will eliminate some of the most problematic and burdensome elements of the current CRA regulation from community banks that are drowning in the regulatory red-tape. I also urge the agencies to seriously consider raising the size of banks eligible for the streamlined examination to \$1 billion in assets to better reflect the current demographics of the banking industry.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Paul Van Ostenbridge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P".

Paul Van Ostenbridge
President & CEO

CC: C. Woods-Daisley

PVO:pme