

May 8, 2020

The Honorable Pat Roberts
United States Senate
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
United States House of Representatives
2204 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
United States Senate
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Conaway
United States House of Representatives
2469 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow, Chairman Peterson and Ranking Member Conaway,

As our nation faces an unprecedented health care crisis, the health care infrastructure in many rural communities has been in crisis for years. As the rest of America's health care system works to recover, rural health care could be left even further behind. Since 2010, rural communities have lost 128 hospitals and another 700 are in danger of closing. We must take action now to strengthen the rural health care system so that rural Americans are not disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout this crisis Farm Credit has been a reliable, trusted partner for many rural residents as they work to stabilize their farm businesses. However, we believe Farm Credit has the capacity, willingness and experience to do even more. For many years Farm Credit participated in a special program to help provide funding for community facilities – specifically, rural hospitals, rural nursing homes and rural assisted living facilities. In most cases, Farm Credit partnered with a local bank or credit union and brought vital funding and expertise to communities who were out of options.

Unfortunately, Farm Credit's regulator, the Farm Credit Administration, has since discontinued the program Farm Credit utilized to make these important investments in rural health care facilities and has indicated an unwillingness to restart the program without legislative guidance. We know firsthand the challenges facing rural health care systems and we fear without additional support, COVID-19 could make it even more difficult for rural Americans to receive the health care services they need. That is why we support including language in upcoming COVID-19 relief legislation to provide Farm Credit the explicit authority to help finance health care and other vital rural community facilities.

Including such language would be at no cost to the federal government and would provide rural communities the flexibility they need to upgrade, expand and build facilities that fit the needs of their residents. As organizations that represent the interests of rural America, we stand firm in our belief that Farm Credit can be an even more robust resource to the communities we serve if given the opportunity. Thank you for all of that you are doing to support rural America and our nation as we navigate these challenging times together. We look forward to working with you to ensure that rural health care systems are not left behind as all communities work to recover.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Family Physicians

American Farm Bureau Federation

Farm Credit Council

National Association of Counties

National Association of Rural Health Clinics

National Farmers Union

National Rural Health Association