State Bank
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March 31, 2004

Jennifer J. Johnson, Secretary
Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System
20th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20551

Re: Docket NO. R-1181

Dear Ms. Johnson,

I am writing to support the federal bank regulatory agencies' proposal to enlarge the number of banks and savings associations that will be examined under the small institution Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) examination. The Agencies propose to increase the asset threshold from $250 million to $500 million and to eliminate any consideration of whether the small instiurion is owned by a holding company. This proposal is clearly a major step towards an appropriate implementation of the Community Reinvestment ACT and should greatly reduce regulatory burden on those institutions newly made eligible for the small institution examination, and I strongly support both of them.

When the CRA regulations wcrc rewritten in 1995, the banking industry recommenced that community banks of at least $500 million be eligible for a less burdensome small institution examination. The most significant improvements in the new regulations were the addition that small institution CRA examination, which actually did what the Act required; had examiners, during their examination of the bank, look at the bank's loans and assess whether the bank was helping to meet the credit needs of the banks entire community. It imposed no investment requirement on small banks, since the Act is about credit not investment. It added no dare reporting requirements on small banks, fulfillingthe promise of the Act's sponsor, Senator Proxmire, that there would be no additional paperwork or recordkeeping burden on banks if the Act passed. And it created a simple, understandable assessment test of the bank's record of providing credit in its community: the test considers the institution's loan-to-deposit ration; the percentage of loans in its assessment areas; its record of lending to borrowers of different income levels and businesses and farms of differentsizes; the geographic distribution of its loans; and its record *of* taking action, if warranted, in response to written complaints about its performance in helping to meet credit needs in its assessment areas.

Since then, the regulatory burden on small banks like State Bank of Southern Utah has grown substantially because of the additional reporting reyuiremcnts for HMDA, the USA Patriot Act and the privacy provisions of the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act. But the nature of community banks has not changed. wc continue to serve our local communities. Our bank must now comply with the large bank requirements because we have passed the $250 million threshold, yet we operate in a small five county area in southwest Utah. Eighty percent of our small farm and small business loans and ninety-fivepercent of our mortgage loans are done in our service area, yet

we are saddled with the reporting requirement as a large bank. The additional burden imposed by the threshold being placed so low actually *takes* staff time that could berter be used to serve the credit needs of our communities! Remember, a $250 million bank is very small just because of inflation and natural growth over the last ten years.

I believe that it is as true today as it was in 1995, and in 1977 when Congress enacted CRA, that a community bank meets the credit needs of its community if it makes a certain amount of loans relative to deposits raken. A community bank is typically non-complex; it takes deposits and makes loans. Its business activities are usually focused on small, defined geographic areas where the bank is known in the community. The small institution examination accurately captures the information necessary for examiners to assess whether a community bank is helping to meet the credit needs of its community.

As the Agencies state in their proposal, raising the small institution CRAS examination threshold to $500 makes numerically more community banks eligible. However, in reality raising the asset threshold to $500 million and elimination of the holding company limitation would retain the percentage of industry asset subject to the large retail institution test. It would decline only slightly, from a little more than 90% to a little less than 90%. That decline, though slight, would more closely align current distribution of assets between small and large banks with the distribution that was anticipated when he Agencies adopted the definition of "small institution." Thus, the Agencies, in revising the CRA regulation, are really just preserving the *status* quo of the regulation, which has been altered by a drastic decline in the number of banks, inflation and an enormous increase in the size of large banks. I believe that the Agencies need to provide greater relief to community banks than just preserve the *status* quo of this regulation.

while the small institution test was the most significant improvement of the revised CRA, it was wrong to limit its application to only banks below $250 million in assets, depriving many community banks from any regulatory relief. Currently, our bank faces significantly more requirements that substantially increase regulatory burdens without consistently producing additional benefits as contemplated by the Community Reinvest Act, In today's banking market, even a $500 million bank often has only a handful of branches, I recommend raising the asset threshold for small institution examination to at least $1 billion. Raising the limit to $1 billion is appropriate for two reasons. First, if you keep the focus of small institutions on lending'which the small institution examination does, it would be entirely consistent with the purpose of the Community Reinvestment Act, which is to ensure that the Agencies evaluate how banks help to meet the credit needs of the communities they serve.

Second, raising the limit to $1 billion will have only a small effect on the amount of total industry assets covered under the more comprehensive large bank test. According to the Agencies' own findings, raising the limit from $250 to $500 million would reduce total industry assets covered by the large bank test by less than one percent. According lo December 31, 2003, Call Report data, raising the limit to $1 billion will reduce the amount of assets subject to the much more burdensome large institution test by only 4% (to about 85%) Yet, the additional relief provided would again, be substantial, reducing the compliance burden on more than 500 additional banks and savings associations (compared to a $500 million limit). Accordingly, I urge the Agencies to raise the limit to at least $1 billion, providing significant regulatory relief while, to quote the Agencies in the proposal, not diminishing "in anyway the obligation of all insured depository institutions subject to CRA to help meet the credit needs of their communities. Instead, the changes are meant only to address the regulatory burden associated with evaluating institutions under CRA."

In conclusion, I strongly support increasing the asset-size of banks eligible for the small bank streamlined CRA examination process as a vitally important step in reviving and improving the CRA regulations and in reducing regulatory burden. I also support eliminating separate holding company qualification for the small institution examination, since it places small community banks that are part of a larger holding company at a disadvantage to their peers and has no legal basis in the Act. While community banks, of course, still will he examined under CRA for their record of helping to meet the credit needs of their communities, this change will eliminate some of the most problematic and burdensome elements of the current CRA regulation from community banks that tare drowning in regulatory red-tape.

Sincerely,

Ron Heaton

Ronald W. Heaton
President & CEO
State Bank of Southern Utah