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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4602

July 13, 2011

Honorable Timothy F. Geithner
Secretary of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20220

Mr. John E. Bowman
Acting Director
Office of Thrift Supervision
1700 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20552

Honorable Shaun L. S. Donovan
Secretary
Housing & Urban Development
451 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20410

Honorable Mary Schapiro
Chairman of the Securities and Exchange
Commission
100 F Street, NE
Washington, DC 20549

Honorable Ben S. Bernanke
Chairman
The Federal Reserve
20th & Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20551

Mr. John G. Walsh
Acting Comptroller of the Currency
250 E. Street, SW
Washington, DC 20219

Honorable Sheila C. Bair
Chairman
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
550 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20429

Mr. Edward J. DeMarco
Acting Director
Federal Housing Finance Agency
1700 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20552

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am concerned with the proposed rule to implement a risk retention exemption – the qualified residential mortgage (QRM) – included in Title IX, Section 941 of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. I fear that this regulation will be overly burdensome to average American households and further stall our economic recovery.

As proposed, the rule would have a negative impact on the ability of my constituents in Virginia's Second Congressional District to realize the dream of homeownership. Your proposal may ultimately reduce the availability of affordable mortgage capital for these otherwise creditworthy consumers.

Dodd-Frank requires the QRM definition to be based on “underwriting and product features that historical loan performance data indicate result in a lower risk of default,” and provides clear guidance on the types of factors to be used, including:

- Documentation of income and assets;
- Debt-to-income ratios and residual income standards;
- Product features that mitigate payment shock;
- Restrictions or prohibitions on non-traditional features like negative amortization, balloon payments, and prepayment penalties;
- Mortgage insurance on low down payments.

This guidance is cognizant of the fact that weak underwriting and toxic mortgages are the main cause of mortgage defaults, not well-underwritten mortgages with affordable down payments.

I will concede that, prior to Dodd-Frank, the mortgage industry had arguably too little regulatory oversight which may have caused its collapse. However, as a strong proponent of smarter, lighter regulations, I believe that the additional requirements for QRM's in the proposed rule swing the pendulum too far causing a burdensome regulation that will unduly narrow the QRM definition and unnecessarily increase consumer costs and reduce access to affordable credit. The proposed regulation goes far beyond the intent and language of the Dodd-Frank statute by imposing down payment restrictions that will place the ability to purchase a home out of reach for many Virginia families.

As a result of this regulation, many of my constituents will either be forced to pay much higher rates and fees for safe loans that are deemed "unacceptable" by the extremely narrow QRM criteria, or in many cases not be able to get a mortgage at all. Therefore, I ask you to reconsider this regulation so that its implementation does not unintentionally burden middle-class Americans during an economic recovery.

Sincerely,



Scott Rigell
Member of Congress