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Congress of the United States House of Representatives

July 15, 2011

Honorable Shawn L.S. Donovan
Secretary
United States Department of
Housing & Urban Development
451 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20410

Honorable Ben S. Bernanke
Chairman
Board of Governors of the
Federal Reserve System
20 & Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20551

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

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

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

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

JEFF FORTENBERRY
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NORFOLK, NE 68701
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Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing concerning your notice of proposed rulemaking on the regulations to implement Section 941 of the Dodd-Frank Act which includes defining a Qualified Residential Mortgage (QRM) that will be exempt from the Act's risk retention requirements. I strongly urge you in this process to consider lower down payment loans that have mortgage insurance (MI) as constituting a QRM.

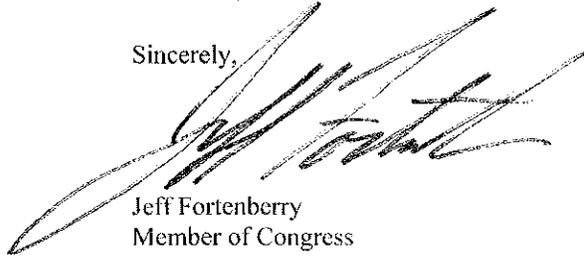
Section 941 of the Dodd-Frank Act specifically names "mortgage guarantee insurance" as one of the factors to be included in the QRM definition. The law recognizes that private capital does not exclusively come from a lender or an investor; it can be provided by a private mortgage insurer. The QRM regulations should reflect this important reality, which was Congress' intent in clarifying this point in the Act. As we seek to ensure sustainable home ownership supported by the private sector, it should not go unnoticed that loans with private mortgage insurance default less often than uninsured loans. Mortgage insurers provide additional scrutiny on a loan application supplementing the lender's review. In addition, mortgage insurers have well-established procedures that have been shown to mitigate and cure loan deficiencies. These safeguards protect lenders and investors while keeping families in their homes. This is important to consider as we seek ways to create sustainable home ownership opportunities for Americans through the private sector with less reliance on government-supported mortgage finance products.

The proposal to require a minimum 20 percent down payment requirement under the QRM definition would reduce the availability of affordable mortgage capital for otherwise qualified consumers. In fact, in 2009, when underwriting standards had already been significantly tightened, the majority of homes were purchased with less than 20 percent down payments. An unnecessarily strict QRM definition would particularly harm first-time and minority homebuyers. Creditworthy first-time homebuyers would be priced out of the market, as evidenced by a survey by the National Association of Realtors that found in 2010, 86 percent of first-time homebuyers made down payments below 20 percent. The resultant reduction in demand for housing, due to an overly burdensome government dictate, would only add to the challenges the housing market faces, and could threaten a full-fledged economic recovery from years to come.

Other overly prescriptive elements of the proposal regarding credit history are best left in the context of establishing broad underwriting standards and principles. I am concerned, for example, that the proposed regulation establishes overly-narrow debt-to-income guidelines last seen more than a generation ago that would further reduce access to credit for a broad range of Americans. Furthermore, this could have the unintended consequence of pushing borrowers to Federal Housing Administration (FHA) insured loans. The FHA is already playing too large of a role in the mortgage market and we should not institute policies that could exacerbate the problem.

I urge you to revise the proposed rule to reflect the intent of Congress by including prudently underwritten privately issued loans within the QRM definition. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Fortenberry", written over a light blue horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Jeff Fortenberry
Member of Congress