

Proposal: 1638 (AF29) Reg Q - Regulatory Capital Rule: Capital Simplification for Qualifying Community Banking

Description:

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From: Field & Main Bank, David Sartore

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Subject: R-1638; Reg Q - Regulatory Capital Rule: Capital Simplification for Qualifying Community Banking Org

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Comments:

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Dear Chairman Powell,

As a community banker, I am responding to your proposal to establish a community bank leverage ratio ("CBLR") as a way to simplify the capital requirements for community banks. Specifically, the proposal calls for the establishment of a CBLR consistent with Section 201 of the Economic Growth, Regulatory Relief, and Consumer Protection Act that would allow banks and holding companies of less than \$10 billion in assets with a tangible equity-to-assets leverage ratio of greater than 9 percent to opt into a CBLR framework and not be subject to other risk-based and leverage capital requirements. Field & Main Bank has never been less than "well capitalized" but the margin is narrowing. In fact the recently adopted capital conservation buffer requires the bank to maintain capital in excess of the "well capitalized" threshold.

While I commend the agencies for several parts of the proposal, particularly the ease at which community banks may opt-in and opt-out of the CBLR framework, the proposed CBLR of 9 percent is too high. At 9 percent the CBLR would be 180 percent of the previously established "well capitalized" leverage ratio of 5 percent. Establishing the ratio at 8 percent, (160 percent of the 5 percent ratio) as allowed by the statute, would calibrate the CBLR closer to current risk-based capital requirements for well-capitalized banks including the common equity tier one ratio of 6.5 percent and the tier one risk-based capital ratio of 8 percent. Furthermore, an 8 percent CBLR would put the ratio closer to the current 5 percent leverage requirement for well-capitalized banks, and would allow approximately 600 more community banks to be eligible to use the new framework.

The proposal to establish a new and separate PCA framework within the CBLR framework is not necessary and could result in unintended consequences. There is no need to establish "proxies" under the CBLR framework for adequately capitalized, undercapitalized and significantly undercapitalized PCA thresholds. Such proxies could serve as an unwarranted penalty for banks that elect the CBLR. Instead, a CBLR bank that falls below the CBLR should be given the opportunity to demonstrate that it is well capitalized under the current PCA Framework before being downgraded to adequately capitalized. To do otherwise could result in the CBLR becoming the new, de facto minimum capital requirement for CBLR banks.

In addition to establishing the CBLR, the banking agencies should continue their efforts to simplify Basel III to reduce the regulatory burden that community banks experience when complying with risk-based capital requirements.

Sincerely,

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