

Proposal: 1723 (AF94) Reg BB - Community Reinvestment Act

Description:

Comment ID: 137612

From: Cares of Washington, Lars Nowack

Proposal: 1723 (AF94) Reg BB - Community Reinvestment Act

Subject: R-1723 Community Reinvestment Act

Comments:

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Proposal:Regulation BB: Community Reinvestment Act [R-1723]

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First name:Lars

Middle initial:

Last name:Nowack

Affiliation (if any):

Affiliation Type:Other (Oth)

Address line 1:1833 north 105th st

Address line 2:suite 202

City:Seattle

State:Washington

Zip:98133

Country:UNITED STATES

Postal (if outside the U.S.):

Your comment:To: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System

RE: Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Community Reinvestment Act Regulations - Docket No. R-1723 and RIN 7100-AF94

February 11th, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

The Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System's (Board) Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) to reform the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) ignores the importance of including low- and moderate-income (LMI) people with disabilities in as a key target audience for qualified CRA investing, lending and services. For too long, people with disabilities in LMI neighborhoods have not been a focus of CRA activities nor been part of the performance evaluation process. As a result, Cares of Washington recommends that the ANPR be revised to address/include the financial and economic needs of low- and moderate-income people with disabilities.

As a person with a disability who has experienced the lack of inclusion and consideration it is vital that we get considered when these changes are made. We want to make economic progress like all people and not be stuck in the public benefits "ghetto" of SSI/SSDI and other subsistence programs that have no real path forward to support ourselves.

People with disabilities are more likely to be low- or moderate-income than those without disabilities.

More than 60 percent of adults with disabilities are considered LMI and the majority live in LMI neighborhoods. People with disabilities are often excluded from mainstream financial services. They are less likely to be banked or have access to mainstream credit. If revised with attention to the comments below, the proposed rule changes to the CRA have the potential to address the needs of this underserved population.

We are particularly concerned about the following five key issues:

The ANPR does not require banks to disaggregate reporting data by gender/race/ethnicity or disability, thereby failing to compel banks to address the historical lack of access and equitable treatment of sub-populations of the LMI community.

The ANPR discusses the applicability of other relevant laws that address discrimination, but fails to

include the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This oversight continues the lack of attention to this most economically vulnerable population and their financial and economic needs. Since the passage of the ADA, financial institutions have, in multiple court cases, been found in violation of the ADA for lack of website accessibility and discriminating practices regarding access to credit.

Performance measurement and metrics must draw specific attention to the economic needs of LMI people with disabilities and impact performance scores. No bank should receive an outstanding rating without both the Community Development and Retail Services Subtests demonstrating a direct response to identified community needs of LMI people with disabilities. Quantitative and qualitative data should be identified and analyzed regarding utilization of retail banking products and services and community development financing that directly responds to needs of LMI individuals with disabilities within and across assessment areas.

A qualifying illustrative list of CRA activities should be included in the final rule that contains specific examples of LMI people with disabilities benefitting from investments, lending and/or service activities. Such a list would begin to provide regulated financial institutions specific ways to meet the needs of this underserved population. Such a list could be developed with input from the disability and financial communities.

Banks should receive CRA credit for investment in workforce development activities including apprenticeships, internships, on-the-job skills training and skill certifications that are vitally important to many LMI populations, including those with disabilities. Workforce development activity should be identified separately, rather than simply as a subpart of economic development activities. In light of millions of job losses due to COVID-19, an emphasis on workforce development activities deserves specific attention for CRA credit.

Vibrant communities are best supported when economic opportunities are inclusive of LMI populations, including people with disabilities. Unless the challenges of LMI people with disabilities are intentionally addressed, people with disabilities will be unintentionally excluded from the financial system and overlooked as a target of community development activities.

The Board needs to revise the ANPR in its current form and offer, for the first time, a set of rules that responds to improved financial inclusion and economic stability for low- and moderate-income people with disabilities.

Thank you for your attention to and support of my comments.

Sincerely,
Lars Nowack
CEO
Cares of Washington