



Statement for the Record

Submitted to the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
Hearing on “Reauthorization of the Economic Development Administration:
State and Local Perspectives”
June 21, 2023

On behalf of the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC), I want to thank the Committee for holding this important hearing on reauthorizing the Economic Development Administration (EDA).

RVCC is committed to strengthening and elevating the voices of rural leaders on issues such as collaborative all-lands stewardship, renewable energy, climate change, and local workforce development. Given EDA’s vital contributions to rural economic development, the coalition is eager to see the EDA reauthorized.

The EDA has a proven track record of promoting economic development in distressed areas, enabling communities to overcome challenges and harness their full potential. By providing financial assistance, technical assistance, and targeted resources, the EDA has played a crucial role in supporting regional economic growth and improving the quality of life for millions of Americans. The agency’s core programs, including Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance, help severely distressed communities develop critical infrastructure, develop comprehensive economic development strategies, and recover from economic shocks.

RVCC strongly encourages the inclusion of additional community capacity building resources in legislation reauthorizing EDA. Many communities, particularly those in rural areas, do not have the bandwidth or resources to develop project proposals, carry out predevelopment activities and feasibility studies, or submit grant applications. Increased funding for capacity building would lessen the burden on the communities most in need of assistance and empower them to submit competitive applications for federal grants.

We also encourage authorizing programming to support tailored workforce development. For example, EDA’s Good Jobs Challenge – funded by the American Rescue Plan Act – invested in worker-centric training partnerships focused on building the skills needed in industries across

the country. In the West, upskilling in the stewardship economy has the potential to have a significant impact on conservation and wildfire mitigation.

The EDA is in dire need of updates to its statutory authority. In the almost two decades since the agency was last reauthorized, our economy and workforce have changed immeasurably. We urge the Committee to take action on this issue as soon as possible.

Thank you for emphasizing this important issue and for your commitment to supporting sustainable development in rural communities. We look forward to supporting the Committee's efforts to reauthorize the EDA and strengthen rural economies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurel Harkness". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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