



NRWA Praises House of Representatives' Proposal to Extend Drinking Water Service Rural Communities

(Washington, DC) The **National Rural Water Association** (NRWA), the largest community-based water utility organization in the country, is praising a new provision in the House Appropriations Committee Fiscal Year 2018 Agriculture Appropriations Bill. The committee passed the bill on July 12, 2017 and included a provision supported by NRWA to help rural communities struggling with their water infrastructure through development of regional partnerships with their neighboring communities who may have more resources.

The committee's "***Unserved and Underserved Rural Communities***," provision states, *"The Committee recognizes there are unserved or underserved rural areas within the U.S. that lack the technical, financial, or managerial capacity to adequately operate, maintain or provide safe and affordable water and wastewater service necessary to protect and enhance the public health and economic vitality of their communities. It is noted that many contiguous and local utilities located outside the unserved or underserved service area have the capacity to provide sustainable, essential water and wastewater services to these areas. The Committee directs the Secretary to explore the potential of providing financial and other incentives to the local or contiguous utilities that have the demonstrated capacity and ability to provide essential water and waste water services to these unserved or underserved communities. The Secretary shall provide a report to the Committees on Appropriations of the House and Senate with findings and recommendations within 180 days of enactment of this Act."*

NRWA initiated a new effort to assist rural communities with regional solutions three years ago and has been convening an annual "Rural Water District Policy Conference" each year in Washington, DC. NRWA's Director of Legislative Affairs, Bill Simpson, said, *"Our investment and innovation in advancing regional rural water solutions has paid off with this new emphasis and attention in Congress. NRWA has been leading the effort to advance workable regional water solutions thanks to the participation of regional water utility volunteers who attend our annual conference and set our policy and priorities. We support the concept and encourage these partnerships when it makes local economic sense because growing economies of scale result in lower cost to the consumer than operating independent water utilities. The key ingredient in any successful regionalization is local support for the regional concept – and local control of when and how they choose to regionalize. NRWA's local members have led or assisted in more communities regionalizing their water supplies than any program, policy or organization."*

The House Appropriations Committee fiscal year 2018 Agriculture Appropriations bill totals \$20 billion in discretionary funding, including \$473 million for USDA's Water and Sewer Loan and Grant program that helps to construct water and wastewater infrastructure through grants and loans provided at reasonable rates and terms. Also, the bill includes \$17 million for technical assistance "Circuit Riders" who are experts to travel directly to small and rural communities to help ensure compliance with current water regulations, operations, maintenance, management, and training.

30 # 30 # 30