

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 12, 2023

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
1010 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Scott:

As you begin negotiations of the 2023 Farm Bill, we respectfully request that you include the reauthorization of the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC) and give consideration to the inclusion of the below seven recommendations to assist the Commission in furthering economic development strategies, which promote job creation and spur economic growth throughout the region.

- I. Modification of Matching Funds Requirement:** Of the 428 counties within the Southeast Crescent region, 166 of them (39%) are categorized as distressed. Many of them are rural communities and lack the resources to meet local match requirements for federal grants. According to 40 U.S.C. § 15501(d)(2), “the maximum Commission contribution for a project or activity to be carried out in a county for which a distressed county designation...may be increased to 80 percent.” To maintain uniformity and consistency with § 15501(d)(2), § 15506(e) should likewise provide SCRC with discretion to contribute not more than 90 percent. Just as the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) “may increase the Federal Share of the costs of a project under the Federal grant program to not more than 90 percent”, SCRC should have the same discretion.¹ **Giving SCRC the flexibility to similarly increase its federal share towards distressed counties from 80 to 90 percent will provide its communities with greater opportunities to leverage Commission grant funding with other programs.**

- II. SCRC State Capacity Building Grant Program:** A state capacity building grant program allows a regional commission to provide grants to its commission states for business retention and expansion, job creation, workforce development, and economic and infrastructure development plans. If a member state receives a grant, it may then dispense the grant to eligible counties after a work plan is approved by the Commission. In the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) was authorized to implement a state capacity building grant program, however, the authorization does not apply to SCRC. **Reauthorization of SCRC should have a state capacity building grant program like NBRC that will allow the Commission to**

¹ 7 U.S.C. § 2009aa-3

identify, target, and work with eligible counties in need of economic and infrastructure plans.²

- III. Housing-Related Activity for Economic Development:** Housing should be included in the purposes for providing grants, including state capacity building grants. SCRC is presently allowed to make grants that further the development of infrastructure, jobs, health care, conservation, and energy. However, housing is not listed among these granting purposes. Housing is vital to furthering economic development and job creation within SCRC's region, particularly in rural areas. Currently, SCRC cannot provide economic development housing incentives to support job creation and workforce needs. Housing is also not listed as a purpose for state capacity building grants. Without adequate housing, economic development and job creation are stymied, as there is no place for a workforce to live. **Accordingly, § 15501 should include language stating that SCRC may provide grants for these purposes. This language should also appear as one of the purposes for state capacity building grants.**
- IV. Leasing Language:** Currently, SCRC may “enter into and perform such contracts...as are necessary to carry out Commission duties.”³ SCRC's authorizing statute does not expressly include language regarding SCRC's ability to lease office space. The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) may “enter into and perform such contracts, leases (including the lease of office space for any term), ...necessary in carrying out its functions.”⁴ **A provision resembling ARC's leasing language will provide SCRC with the authority to secure appropriate space and satisfy its statutory duties, functions, and obligations.**
- V. The Retention of Fees for the J-1 Visa Waiver Program:** SCRC should be able to collect, retain, and expend fees for services that are related to the initial collection of the fees. SCRC administers its J-1 Visa Waiver Program to assist and retain medical doctors from other countries when they apply for a J-1 visa waiver. These doctors provide medical services within rural areas that would otherwise experience a lack of medical professionals for vulnerable communities. Economic and job growth is nurtured by access to health care. SCRC should be allowed to collect fees for the J-1 visa waivers to process applications, provide program compliance, and give additional support to work with the United States Department of State. Although SCRC may “accept, use, and dispose of gifts or donations or services or real, personal, tangible, or intangible property,” there is no language explicitly addressing SCRC's ability to collect, retain, and appropriately expend fees. **Statutory language pertaining to this issue will ensure SCRC may “collect, retain, and expend fees for the service for which they were**

² These changes are embodied within H.R. 6986 (117th) and S. 3698 (117th). S. 292 was recently introduced in the 118th Congress, and it reauthorizes the NBRC.

³ 40 U.S.C. § 15304(a)(8)

⁴ 40 U.S.C. § 14306(a)(7)

collected” allowing the Commission to attract and retain qualified medical professionals to serve in communities that lack a robust healthcare workforce.

VI. Annual Report Submission: Reauthorization should amend authorizing language to increase the time allotted for an annual report submitted to the President and Congress. Revisions to statutory language should mirror language afforded to the ARC, which currently submits its annual report, “Not later than six months after the close of each fiscal year...to the President, for transmittal to Congress.”⁵ The statutory revision should allow for “90 days” to be changed to “180 days” in § 15308(a). SCRC is currently required to submit its annual report, “Not later than 90 days after the last day of each fiscal year.” **This language will provide consistency in reporting among the different regional commissions and allow SCRC adequate time to prepare comprehensive annual reports.**

VII. Funding Fiscal Years: Reauthorization should also include funding language for future fiscal years. As S. 292 proposes, the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission, the Southwest Border Regional Commission, and the Northern Border Regional Commission should be authorized to receive funding in the amount of “\$50,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2023 through 2027” and “\$60,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2028 through 2032.” **This language will ensure that SCRC is adequately funded to carry out its statutory obligations and duties across the numerous counties in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia.**

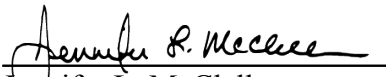
As you know, SCRC is a federal-state independent agency aimed at improving economic conditions and quality of life in historically underserved parts of the southeastern U.S. Created through the 2008 Farm Bill (P.L. 110-234). The agency exists to support job and business creation and retention in areas of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi not already served by the Appalachian Regional Commission and Delta Regional Authority. We believe these recommendations will embolden SCRC to increase capacity for programming and services for the 428 counties and county equivalents included under the jurisdiction of the Commission.

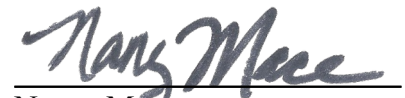
Attention to these seven priorities will deliver resources critical to carry out local and regional improvements, including transportation, basic public infrastructure, telecommunications, skills development, entrepreneurship and business development, basic health care, tourism, and recreation aligned with economic development goals, and renewable and alternative energy.


Thank you for your consideration of this request as you consider the 2023 Farm Bill.

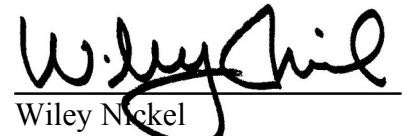
Sincerely,

⁵ 40 U.S.C. § 14310

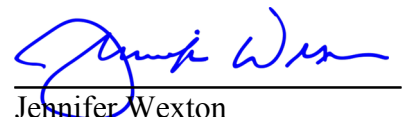

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Member of Congress



Nancy Mace
Member of Congress



Joe Wilson
Member of Congress



Wiley Nickel
Member of Congress

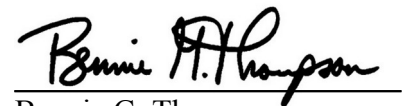

Russell Fry
Member of Congress

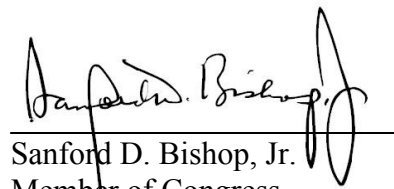

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Bennie G. Thompson
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Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
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CC: The Honorable Sam Graves

The Honorable Rick Larsen