

Statement of

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At the Interagency Outreach Meeting on  
The Economic Growth and Regulatory Paperwork Reduction Act

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Good Morning.

I'd like to thank each of you for being here today to join in this discussion about how we can reduce unnecessary regulatory burden on community banks. This is the third such hearing we are holding under the Economic Growth and Paperwork Reduction Act, or EGRPRA, and both of the previous discussions were quite vigorous. I'm looking forward to an equally lively discussion today!

As you know, we are working on this project on an interagency basis, as well as through the offices of the Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council, or FFIEC, which brings together the banking agencies, the National Credit Union Administration, and the state supervisory agencies. The FFIEC participation is especially appropriate, since we have been making increasing use of it to provide support to community banks, particularly in resource-intensive areas like cybersecurity.

Smaller banks and thrifts don't have the same kind of resources that large institutions can bring to bear on regulatory compliance, and if we can eliminate unnecessary rules and streamline others, we can make it easier for these institutions to serve the economic needs of their communities. With this in mind, we expect to have an

outreach meeting later this year focused solely on rural banks, which face their own unique challenges.

Of course, it's true that regulations by their nature carry at least some burden. Most provide public benefits that outweigh the burden they impose. But what worries me is the way that the regulatory rulebook builds up over time, adding layer after layer of requirements that can be quite onerous for small banks. So we at the OCC are taking this process very seriously. I'm very interested in hearing from the panelists and members of the audience about specific regulations that are either outdated, unnecessary, or needlessly burdensome, as well as your ideas for areas of improvement.

If you don't get a chance to speak today, I would encourage you to submit a written comment. You can use one of the comment forms we have here, or you can respond to one of the upcoming *Federal Register* notices. We will consider carefully all of the comments received today, and a summary will be published on the regulations.gov Web site and included in our report to Congress.

While this process will unfold over some time, I can assure you that we at the OCC will not wait until it is over to make changes when a solid case has been made for reform. If it is clear that a regulation is unduly burdensome, and if we have authority to make changes to eliminate that burden, we will act. However, many regulatory requirements are rooted in laws passed by Congress, and changes may require legislative action. In those cases, we will work with Congress to remove unnecessary burdens.

The OCC has advanced three specific proposals to eliminate regulatory burden. We've discussed them with lawmakers, and we are hopeful that Congress will act on them in the current legislative session.

First, we think a greater number of healthy, well-managed community institutions ought to qualify for the 18-month examination cycle. By raising the asset threshold from \$500 million to \$750 million, more than 100 OCC-supervised banks and thrifts and several hundred additional institutions would qualify for the extended cycle. That would not only reduce the burden on those well-managed institutions, it would allow the federal banking agencies to focus our supervisory resources on those banks and thrifts that present capital, managerial, or other issues of significant supervisory concern.

Another idea that we think is ripe for congressional action is a community bank exemption from the Volcker Rule. We don't believe it is necessary to include smaller institutions under the Volcker Rule in order to realize Congressional intent, and we recommend exempting the more than 6,000 banks and thrifts with less than \$10 billion in assets.

Finally, we've developed a proposal to provide federal savings associations with greater flexibility to expand their business model without changing their governance structure. It's important that federal savings associations, like other businesses, have the flexibility to adapt to changing economic and business environments in order to meet the needs of their communities, and they shouldn't have to bear the expense of changing charters in order to do so. We have recommend authorizing a basic set of powers that both federal savings associations and national banks can exercise, regardless of their charter, so that savings associations can change business strategies without moving to a different charter.

We're gaining some traction on Capitol Hill. I am pleased that Representatives Keith Rothfus of Pennsylvania and Jim Hines of Connecticut have introduced the Federal

Savings Association Charter Flexibility Act which embodies the objectives of my proposal to provide needed flexibility to the federal thrift charter. In addition, legislation has also been introduced that will increase the asset size threshold required to allow for an extended examination cycle for community banks.

I think these legislative proposals are meaningful steps which could help a great number of smaller institutions. But we shouldn't stop there. We should be looking at every approach that might help community banks thrive in the modern financial world.

One especially promising approach involves collaboration, which was the subject of a paper we issued recently. By pooling resources, smaller institutions can trim costs and serve customers that might otherwise lie beyond their reach. They can jointly purchase materials or services, share back office or other services or jointly develop or provide products and services.

At the OCC, we've seen a number of examples of successful collaborative efforts. For example, several community banks formed an alliance through a loan participation agreement to bid on larger loan projects in competition with larger financial institutions. Elsewhere, a group of banks pooled their resources to finance community development activities through multi-bank community development corporations, loan pools, and loan consortia.

And I hope community banks won't stop with those projects. There are opportunities to save money by collaborating on accounting, clerical support, data processing, employee benefit planning, health insurance – and the list goes on. Speaking only for the federal banking system, federal law and OCC regulations facilitate

collaborative arrangements through operating subsidiaries, service companies, and other structures.

I would encourage you to take a look at our paper on the subject, which is titled, “An Opportunity for Community Banks: Working Together Collaboratively.” You can find it on our Web site, at OCC-dot-gov.

Let me finish by saying that we have much work ahead of us. I can tell you, though, that all of us here are committed to making this process work and to doing everything possible to eliminate unnecessary regulatory burden.

Thank you all for being with us today. I look forward to hearing from you.