July 24, 2017

Dear Chairman Cochran, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman Hoeven, and Ranking Member Merkley:

On behalf of America’s 19,000 cities and towns, I write to thank you for your leadership in passing an Agriculture and Rural Development Appropriations Bill that preserves funding for local priorities for rural infrastructure, rural businesses and rural housing.

As the voice of cities in Washington, NLC appreciates the work of the committee to preserve funding for these Rural Development programs. These programs are vital to ensuring that small cities and towns can maintain and improve water systems, have access to broadband services, provide affording housing, and expand market and business opportunities. Together, these investments spur economic growth by supporting basic infrastructure, providing loans to rural businesses and industries, and strengthening housing markets in rural areas.

At the same time, city leaders are concerned that the bill lacks sufficient funding for supplemental nutrition programs that have a tremendous impact on the lives of our most vulnerable citizens and shifts the cost of intergovernmental projects and services from the federal level to municipal governments. For many cities, particularly small and rural communities with a limited tax-base, the cost shift may be too great to be made up for with local revenue. Specifically, we are concerned that the bill reduces funding to the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), thereby encouraging a re-balancing of the federal-state partnership. We urge Congress to continue to provide robust funding for SNAP and other programs that support low-income families.
Cities and towns are growing the job market and driving the U.S. economy. Cities are home to 86 percent of the nation's population, 88 percent of total real income, and 91 percent of real gross domestic product. Local governments invest $7 trillion annually on services residents expect, including vital safety net programs.

As the FY18 budget and appropriations process moves, we look forward to working with Members of Congress in both Chambers to raise the budget caps to a level sufficient for meeting the responsibilities that citizens expect from their elected representatives. Additionally, we urge every Member of Congress to seek the direct feedback of local elected officials in their home states and congressional districts. Please consider NLC a resource to that end by contacting Carolyn Berndt, NLC’s Program Director for Sustainability, at 202-626-3101 or berndt@nlc.org.

Sincerely,

Clarence E. Anthony
CEO and Executive Director