



THE BERKSHIRE BANK

The Bank that puts your interest first

Mr. Robert E. Feldman
Executive Secretary
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
550 Seventeenth Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20429

Re: Deposit Insurance Assessments and Federal Home Loan Bank Advances

Dear Mr. Feldman:

With respect to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation notice of proposed rulemaking and request for comment on deposit insurance assessments, the Berkshire Bank (the "Bank") appreciates the opportunity to comment on this important matter.

The Bank would like to specifically address the FDIC's request for comment on whether Federal Home Loan Bank (FHLBank) advances should be included in the definition of volatile liabilities or, alternatively, whether higher assessment rates should be charged to institutions that have significant amounts of secured liabilities.

Please note that such advances are not deemed to be volatile liabilities for FHLBank members. FHLBank advances have pre-defined, understood, and predictable terms. Unlike deposits, advances do not evaporate due to circumstances outside of the control of an FHLBank member. Experience has shown that deposits may be lost due to disintermediation arising from a variety of factors: special, short-term promotions in a particular market or the existence of higher returns to depositors on alternative assets. While some institutions can look to Wall Street for replacement liabilities, the money and capital markets have not functioned well as long-term, stable providers of wholesale funds to the community banks that comprise the bulk of the membership of the FHLBank System.

As set forth by Congress, the primary purpose of the FHLBank System is to provide a source of long-term liquidity for FHLBank members. Throughout their 75-year history, the FHLBanks have performed this mission successfully. The FHLBanks are a stable, reliable source of funds for member institutions, and the availability of such credit has a predictable, beneficial effect on members' business plans.

It would be illogical to include FHLBank advances in the definition of volatile liabilities given the stability of the FHLBanks, the reliable availability of advances as a source of wholesale funding, and the beneficial and predictable effect of such funding on members' business plans. The Bank urges the FDIC not to include Federal Home Loan Bank advances in the definition of volatile liabilities.

Deposit insurance premiums should be based on an institution's actual risk profile, taking into account an institution's supervisory rating and capital ratios. Banks that are engaged in excessively risky activities should pay a higher premium, regardless of whether those activities are financed by insured deposits, FHLBank advances, or alternative wholesale funding sources.

Discouraging borrowing from the FHLBanks would be counterproductive to reducing the risk of failure of FDIC-insured institutions. In fact, discouraging the use of FHLBank advances could lead to the perverse effect of increasing risks to FHLBank members. Borrowers frequently use FHLBank advances for liquidity purposes and to manage interest-rate risk, as well as to fund loan growth. In many markets, the supply of deposit funds is inadequate to meet loan demand and prudent financial management needs. Curtailing the use of FHLBank advances would force institutions to look to alternative, often more costly wholesale funding sources that are demonstrably more volatile, thereby reducing profitability and increasing liquidity risk.

Penalizing the use of advances through the imposition of insurance premiums also would conflict with the intent of Congress in establishing the FHLBanks, in opening membership in FHLBanks to commercial banks in FIRREA, and, more recently, in adopting the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, which expanded small banks' access to advances. The FHLBanks' mission is to provide financial institutions with access to low-cost funding so they may adequately meet communities' credit needs to support homeownership and community development. Charging higher assessments to those banks utilizing advances would, in effect, use the regulatory process to vitiate the FHLBanks' mission as established and repeatedly reaffirmed by the Congress.

Further, a regulatory and legal structure is already in place to ensure collaboration between the FDIC and the FHLBanks. If an FDIC-insured institution is experiencing financial difficulties, the FDIC and the relevant FHLBank are required by regulation to engage in a dialogue to ensure the institution has adequate liquidity while minimizing other risks, including losses to the FDIC. In addition, the FHLBanks are provided the legal authority for confidential access to examination reports to assist with this analysis.

The cooperative relationship between the FHLBanks and member financial institutions has worked remarkably well for 75 years. FHLBank advances serve as a critical source of credit for housing and community development purposes, support sound financial management practices, and allow member banks throughout the nation to remain competitive. FHLBank membership has long been viewed as protection for deposit insurance funds because FHLBank members have access to guaranteed liquidity. Penalizing financial institutions for their cooperative relationship with the FHLBanks would result in their being less competitive, limit credit availability in the communities they serve, and limit their use of a valuable liquidity source, all for no justifiable economic or public policy reason.


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The Bank urges the FDIC not to include FHLBank advances in the definition of volatile liabilities.

Thank you again for providing the Bank with the opportunity to address this important matter.

If you have any questions, please call me at 212-802-1020.

Sincerely,



Stanley Wong
Senior Vice President and Chief Risk Officer