

From: wroush@gmail.com on behalf of Will Roush
<will@wildernessworkshop.org>
Sent: Tuesday, March 27, 2012 1:20 PM
To: !FHFA REG-COMMENTS
Subject: Comments submitted to FHFA on PACE by the Wilderness Workshop
Attachments: Comments submitted to FHFA on PACE by Wilderness Workshop.docx

Dear Mr. Pollard,

Please find attached comments on the PACE program submitted by the Wilderness Workshop.

Wilderness Workshop (WW) is a 501(c)(3) dedicated to preservation and conservation of the wilderness and natural resources of the White River National Forest and adjacent public lands, in central Colorado. WW engages in research, education, legal advocacy and grassroots organizing to protect the ecological integrity of local landscapes and public lands. WW focuses on the monitoring and conservation of air and water quality, wildlife species and habitat, natural communities and lands of wilderness quality. WW is the oldest environmental nonprofit in the Roaring Fork Valley, dating back to 1967 with a membership base of 700. Many of our members care deeply about the impacts that climate change will have on the economy, culture and environment of Central Colorado. The PACE program has the potential to play a significant role in reducing carbon emissions and slowing global climate change.

Sincerely,
Will Roush

Will Roush
Conservation Advocate
Wilderness Workshop
P.O. Box 1442 / 520 S. 3rd. St., Suite 27
Carbondale, CO 81623
(970) 963-3977 x15
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Protecting wild places and wildlife for their sake...
and for ours – help us by making a donation today!

March 27, 2012

Mr. Alfred Pollard, General Counsel
Attention: Comments/RIN2590-AA53
Federal Housing Finance Agency
Eighth Floor, 400 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Submitted by email to RegComments@fhfa.gov

RE: Comments/RIN 2590-AA53 (Mortgage Assets Affected by PACE Programs)

Dear Mr. Pollard:

Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) is a groundbreaking state and local government innovation with a clear public purpose: reducing our reliance on imported fuel, promoting energy security, avoiding the cost of building new power plants and transmission systems, and protecting the environment. PACE has enormous potential to save homeowners money, create local jobs and dramatically reduce energy use. Because of its unique ability to spur homeowner investment in energy efficiency and clean, on-site renewable energy, PACE legislation was passed by 28 states in just two and a half years. It has strong bi-partisan support at the local, state and Federal levels. PACE programs have been received with such overwhelming public support because they address one of the most important problems facing America, and offer an ability to scale that is unmatched by other alternatives.

We believe that FHFA's action to unilaterally halt local government PACE programs on July 6, 2010 was unwarranted. This rulemaking provides an opportunity to establish a fact-based record and correct misinformation and misunderstandings, to the benefit of all stakeholders: local governments, mortgage lenders, homeowners, and our nation. We appreciate the opportunity, and urge you to look for ways to accommodate these broadly beneficial programs. To this end, we recommend that the FHFA adopt reasonable underwriting standards that ensure local PACE programs are designed to maximize benefit and minimize risk, as described below.

1) PACE assessments are valid - and are not "loans" as asserted by FHFA

FHFA has repeatedly referred to PACE assessments as "loans." To the contrary, they are property tax assessments with characteristics similar to those of more than 37,000 other land-secured special assessment districts in the United States that are rooted in hundreds of years of state and local law. Such districts are typically created at the voluntary behest of property owners who vote to allow their local governments to finance public improvements such as sewer systems, sidewalks, lighting, parks, open space acquisitions, and business improvements on their behalf. Other districts allow property owners to act voluntarily and individually to adopt municipally financed improvements to their property that are repaid with assessments. PACE districts are similar to many other special assessment districts as well, in the size of their assessments and length of their repayment period.

2) PACE assessments present minimal risks to lenders, investors, homeowners and GSEs

FHFA asserts that PACE presents “significant safety and soundness” concerns, but there is no evidence that this is true. There is long-standing experience, borne out by studies, that energy efficiency and renewable energy improvements reduce homeowners’ energy bills and increase their property’s value, strengthening their financial position and increasing the value of a lender’s collateral. PACE financed improvements allow homeowners to hedge themselves against fuel price spikes and rising fuel costs over time. These factors lessen, if not eliminate, the safety and soundness risk that the FHFA has asserted. Local governments that established PACE programs prior to the July 6, 2010 action by FHFA developed program standards to protect lenders and consumers. The White House (October 18, 2009) and the Department of Energy (May 7, 2010) both published national PACE guidelines with clear, strong underwriting standards to ensure that homeowners are able to afford the improvements. A bi-partisan bill in the House of Representatives (HR 2599 – Hayworth R-NY19) further delineates national standards to minimize risk to lenders and consumers. Finally, the early results of PACE pilot programs in Boulder County, CO; Sonoma County and Palm Desert, CA; and Babylon, NY; show that PACE presents minimal risk: there are only a handful of known defaults out of nearly 3,200 upgraded properties, substantially fewer than the rate of default for non-PACE property-owners in the same districts.

3) Home energy improvements financed with PACE achieve important economic and environmental benefits

State and local governments (including Pitkin County) have also passed PACE laws because PACE has great potential to help governments attain important economic and environmental goals. For example, according to a May 2011 Department of Energy study, the Boulder County PACE program created over 120 jobs, generated more than \$20 million in overall economic activity and reduced consumers’ energy use by more than \$125,000 in the first year alone. These benefits are important by themselves. In developing a rule that serves the public interest, the FHFA must weigh perceived risks against economic benefits that clearly reduce default rates.

4) Proposed Rule:

We strongly urge you to reconsider your blanket opposition to PACE programs. We recommend that FHFA adopt a rule stipulating that Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, and any other mortgage lenders regulated by FHFA be allowed to buy residential mortgages with PACE assessments that are originated by programs that conform to standards and guidelines such as those established in HR 2599 (The PACE Assessment Protection Act) to protect the interests of local governments, homeowners, mortgage lenders and Government Sponsored Enterprises (GSEs).

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Will Roush

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